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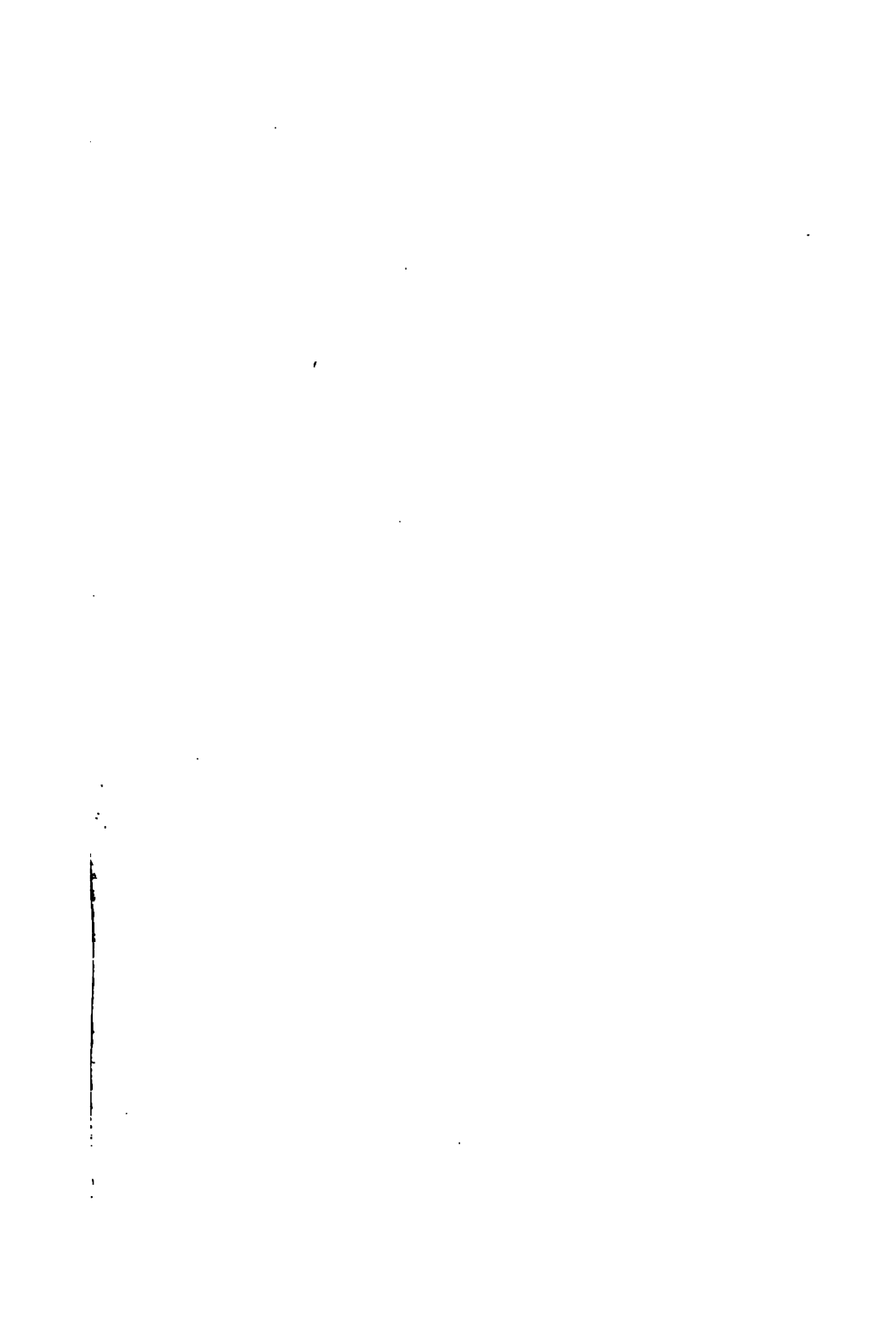
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THEN CAME MOLLY

HARRIET V. C. OGDEN

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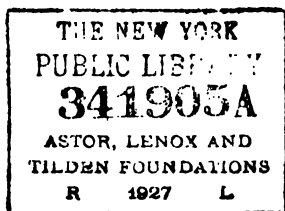
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Then Came Molly

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Then Came Molly

CHAPTER I

ALLOWAY

"Mom CLIO! Put that potato back! Put it back this instant!"

Old Mr. Joseph Oliphant, sitting perched on the horse-block outside the kitchen door, raised his head from his sketch and looked over with an amused smile at Molly Alloway who was standing in the doorway of the storehouse doling out supplies into the upturned apron of an old black woman.

"Put it back in the bin!"

The old woman had an air of offended innocence. "Now yo', Miss Molly! yo' ain't a-goin' ta grudge dis pore ole black woman jes' one 'taty! Wha, ole Missy Jane she——"

"Do as I say."

Mom Clio drew it reluctantly from under her apron and dropped it into the bin.

"You can have all you want if you ask for them. How many do you need?"

"Don't reckon Ah need none."

"Go get wood for the fire then. We'll do the ham out here."

Molly locked the door of the storehouse and joined her guest, perching beside him on the horse-block and looking over his shoulder at his picture.

"I like that," she said. "Only you've idealized us considerably. We're not half as interesting as that really. We're quite commonplace."

"It's a matter of habit, Molly; I don't see anything commonplace about you at all."

From where they sat they could see the whole of the yard around which the life of Alloway Place centered. It was a large irregular space roughly enclosed by open-sided sheds linked together by a log fence. In the centre stood a big open-sided barn where Robert Alloway was sorting his bellowing cattle; these to go through the "dipping pen" to free them from ticks; these for to-morrow's market. To the right was the grain barn from which came the rhythmic thud of hand pestles beating corn to meal, and William Alloway's voice shouting orders in an unintelligible mixture of Gullah and English. Backed up against each sheltering wall a score of piccaninnies, black as ink spots, dozed and blinked in the dusty sunlight, and half a dozen setter dogs, each chained to a block of wood, slept and woke to snap at the flies. A flock of red-billed geese marched and countermarched, hissing, among a crowd of unimpressed chickens, and over in a muddy corner a pair of prize razorbacks grunted and rooted in semi-captivity. Beyond the enclosing fence a row of negro cabins backed into the skirts of the pine woods, soft gray against their darkness.

"You're not commonplace at all. You're ——"

"Primitive?" suggested Molly.

"Well, picturesque, anyway," the old gentleman blinked at her through his glasses, "and interesting, decidedly interesting."

The old negress came out with a tripod and an iron kettle which she hung over a fire of chips.

"Did Hannah get the milk I told Ben to take to your cabin?" asked Molly.

"Yas'm."

"Keep her home a day or two longer, Mom Clio."

"Yas'm."

"No milk, no pudding," Molly said. "I hope you don't mind?"

"Not a bit." Mr. Oliphant turned over his page and began a new sketch.

Molly came up closer to him. "May I watch how you do it?" she asked. "I suppose we're a good deal more picturesque than when you were here before, before the war?"

"She is anyway," he answered, pointing to Mom Clio. "I remember she was a little bit of a thing your Aunt Jane was training to be her body servant, and look at her now! She looks as though that smoke was her natural element, doesn't she? All shrivelled up—nothing left of her eyes but a drop of liquid at the bottom of a slit—and no teeth left at all—and no wool to speak of. Did you ever imagine anything so old looking could be alive? Just exactly like a mummy—exactly."

"She's fun to sketch, isn't she?"

"Do you sketch?"

"Sometimes."

"You must let me see some of your things, if you will. You have wonderful opportunities here." He sounded not at all enthusiastic.

"Yes, I will, I'd like to," said Molly. She called to Mom Clio, "Are you going to 'Boam's burying to-day?"

"No'm. Ah ain't goin'. Ah got ma wuck ta do! Done seen de percession goin' by jes' de same. Sperret settin' on de box."

"What's that?" exclaimed Mr. Oliphant.

"Ya'sir. Sperret settin' on de box. Wished him luck, Ah did."

Molly looked at him, laughing so low the old woman could not hear her.

"Mom Clio was born with a caul, and that, of course, gives her the power to 'see things'!"

The artist blinked very fast behind his glasses, so they fell off his nose and jingled at the end of their black ribbon against the buttons of his coat.

"Naturally," he said, readjusting them, "quite naturally, I suppose. So it was 'settin' on de box,' was it?"

"Ya'sir,—cross-legged."

"Really, how interesting! What do spirits look like?"

"Dey gray, jes' sort o' gray," she answered, gazing thoughtfully into her boiling pot. "Kind o' floats 'bout a foot offen de groun'—dey goin' backwards—got eyes in de back ob dere heads for ta see."

"Gracious goodness! Do you often see them?"

Mom Clio lapsed into Gullah and Molly had to act as interpreter.

"Some mornings the yard is full of them."

"Ya'sir. Brush 'em side comin' over sometimes."

"I don't remember that you used to see them when you were a child, Mom Clio."

"Ya'sir, Ah seen 'em, but Ah didn't say nothin'. Me ma she gimme sumfin ta blind me, but it didn't do no good, jes' gimme headache."

William Alloway came up snapping the lash of his long whip. "Ho there! Something gave you headache, Mom Clio? Wonder what it was." He looked over Mr. Oliphant's shoulder at his sketch. "That beats you all hollow, Moll; I'm afraid you're not a genius."

Mr. Oliphant wriggled his nose at him. "I've an idea you may not be much of a judge," he said.

William laughed and went on his way into the house. Mr. Oliphant looked at Molly with a twinkle behind his glasses. "He deserved that, didn't he? Driving away our 'sperrits.' I believe I'll draw you now. You've become quite a beauty, Molly Alloway."

Molly tipped her head on one side. "Have I now?"

"I suppose you didn't know it," he laughed at her.

"Who'd tell me out here? Unless it was my mirror. And if you must know, it doesn't," she added hurriedly.

"Then it tells fibs."

"Somebody must." She slipped off the horse-block to take refuge in the smoke with Mom Clio.

Mr. Oliphant went on drawing, as unconcerned as though she were sitting still.

"Molly, I'm afraid you're a flirt," he said when she came back.

"The mirror couldn't teach me that."

He smiled at her over the top of his glasses. "I doubt if you needed teaching. Sit still now, if you can, while I do your eyes. Look up at me. They're very like your mother's—your grandmother's, I mean, my child. Very like." He shut up his book with a snap. "Too much like! Is there anything left of Myrtle House?"

"Not much. Sherman's men burned it."

"Has it all gone?"

"Pretty nearly."

"And the gardens?"

"Vanished. The lower end of the avenue of oaks still looked fine when I went by a couple of years ago. But all around the house they had fallen."

Mr. Oliphant was silent, rubbing the tips of his fingers together and wriggling his nose.

"You must take me there, Molly. Mom Clio's right. This place is full of spirits."

CHAPTER II

MOLLY PRIOLEAU

THE Alloway family, besides the heavenly creed bequeathed to them by their ancestors and comfortably accepted and carefully lived up to, held an earthly creed consisting of three parts: the United States is the finest country in the world, South Carolina is the finest State in the Union, and the Alloways are the finest family in the State. But deep down in their hearts they qualified this creed a little. Fine as they were, family, State, and Country would have been finer still had the Confederacy triumphed over the Union. And as far as the family was concerned, there can be no doubt they were right.

Over the mantelpiece in the dining-room at Alloway House, framed under a Confederate flag, hung a collection of Confederate bills of every denomination, amounting in all to thousands of dollars. But United States bills of the smallest denominations were seldom seen there. Year by year since the war, the tide of decay had been rising and rising, engulfing the place foot by foot. Slowly the house was being dismantled. In the drawing-room two bright spots on the faded yellow paper marked the places where "Governor Robert Alloway and Jane, his wife," by Sir Peter Lely, had hung before they went North to a museum; in

the dining-room a deal table had taken the place of the mahogany one, and round-backed kitchen chairs had replaced the daintily carved ones. The roof leaked and the square columns of the portico were rotting at the bottom.

Yet decaying as it was, Alloway was in better condition than any other of the old plantation houses in the neighborhood. It was the only one habitable. Howis House had fallen in on itself; nothing was left of it but the cellar. Pimlico still stood, and from a distance looked intact, but it was rent from roof to foundation by a wide fissure. Broad stone steps and a stately terrace marked the site of Ranleigh. By Myrtle House no one so much as passed any more, except now and then hunters. Not even a trail led up to it. Only two straight lines of live oaks, the long gray moss hanging down from their overarching branches like stalactites in a cave, showed where the avenue had run.

Mr. Oliphant sighed as he and Molly stopped by the old gate-posts.

"We'll have to tie the horses here and walk, I think," said Molly. "I'm afraid they wouldn't be able to push through the underbrush."

The air was soft as summer and sweet with the pungent odor of the swamps. The flat fields, yellow with dry broom-grass, stretched hot and glowing in the sunlight. The dividing banks between them were a mass of tangled jasmine and roses, and the scarlet berried Christmas-vine climbed everywhere, mantling big trees and half choking young saplings. Cardinal birds

flashed here and there like sparks of fire. All the foreground was brilliant with color, but a soft gray haze veiled the horizon. Loneliness and silence brooded over the landscape, only enhanced by the two-wheeled negro mule carts which creaked slowly out of the distance now and then, and slowly away again.

Mr. Oliphant felt the melancholy like an oppression in the air. He had known it when it was so different! As he and Molly, breaking their way through an almost impenetrable tangle, came in sight of ruined Myrtle House, he stopped with an exclamation.

"Molly, Molly, the spirits are thicker here!"

There was nothing left of it but three white columns standing tall and straight among the trees, a fourth prone behind them, propped on a flight of marble steps, and a short strip of brick wall, still framing a tiny window, grated with iron bars.

"I seem to see her still," he murmured, "as I did then—vaguely like a shadow looking out, the light behind her making a halo of her hair. Good Lord! Good Lord! It was another world! I don't suppose you know what I'm talking about, do you, Molly?"

"I'm afraid I don't."

He sat down on the steps and leaning back against the broken column looked out thoughtfully through the trees.

"What a place this was!" he said after a few minutes. "Sit down, Molly. The drive swept round from the end of the oaks there, almost to the bank of the river, and back again in a great curve. All this in front of us was lawn, as smooth and green as satin.

The darkies used to go out twice a day, whole armies of them, and water it and sweep it with brooms. The gardens were over there to the right, where the magnolia tree is, and the race-course and your grandfather's—your great-grandfather's stables were beyond them. What fun it was when he tried out the colts. I remember the day l'Alouette was brought out the first time. She was the prettiest little beast I ever saw and the quickest. I don't believe she was ever beaten till the day she was killed in the Wilderness. You must have heard of l'Alouette, Molly?"

"Oh yes, lots of times."

"You've probably heard about it all a hundred times."

"Grandfather and Aunt Jane and all of them love to talk about it. It's very interesting. I like to hear it. Jane calls it 'The Acts of the Ancestors.'"

"The impertinence of her! They were fine times, Molly. Nothing to compare with them now, nothing, if I am a Northerner who say it. I used to be down here for months at a time in the winter and they used to come North in the summer, the Alloways, and the Prioleaus from Myrtle here, and the Leas from Pimlico, and all the rest of them. I felt as much at home here as they did, I guess. First I used to be mostly at Alloway with Robert until he went abroad to Oxford. Then I came over here and stayed at Myrtle. There was your Uncle William, and Molly, your grandmother—Molly Prioleau." He repeated the name almost in a whisper. "She was beautiful, Molly. You can't hold a candle to her. Keep still, I'm sketching you. You're

not in the least like her, except, perhaps, your forehead. Her eyes were as blue as dancing water, and yours are still and brown—very lovely too, very lovely indeed.”

He wrinkled his nose and looked at her critically. “You were an ugly little picked chicken last time I saw you; exaggerated Alloway, nothing of the Prioleau about you, mostly nose and forehead, and quite distressingly like a tadpole. I’ve always wondered what you would succeed in doing with yourself. I couldn’t believe you could go on like that, with her blood in your veins. I wish you could have seen her, Molly. You have no idea how beautiful she could be.”

“I wish I had. Won’t you give me a piece of paper and let me sketch, too?”

“Yes, if you’ll keep still. It’s queer you’re not more like her. She had wonderful hair, like spun light, waving about her forehead. Yours reminds me of the back of a bird, the way it lies smooth and flat against your head. It’s quite striking against the creamy white of that column. I remember she used to sit there and the little shadows on the column got all mixed up with the shadow in her hair. It was so wild and curly you couldn’t tell the outline at all. Very difficult to paint, very difficult I remember I used to find it. I must have tried it a hundred times over. I wish I’d known as much then as I do now. I’d give anything to have a picture of her.

“The last time was the morning I went away. The morning Sumter was fired on. I ought to have gone sooner, but I couldn’t make up my mind, and I didn’t really believe they’d ever do it. We were out here

talking about it. They were all rather angry with me already because I said they had no right to do it. We were expecting Robert Alloway, your grandfather, any minute. He'd returned from Europe two days before.

"He came up the avenue, I can see him now, the way his horse was trembling as he came round the corner by the magnolia tree on a dead run. He called out, 'Beauregard has opened fire,' before he stopped even. I caught my breath. I think we all did! Even the darkies on the lawn stood with their mouths open. And Molly got up and came over to me. 'Are you going to leave us or are you going to stay with us? If you're going to stay, we'll—we'll be very glad, but if you're going, you would better go right away.'"

He was talking half to himself, his pencil motionless in his hand as he looked away toward the river.

"To think it was here; after all these years! What a decision to have to make, with her standing in front of me! But I couldn't stay. And she went over and laid her hand on Robert Alloway's arm. I never saw her again, except like a shadow in the window there, looking out as I rode away in the dusk."

He was silent, like one dreaming. He roused himself with a shake of the head that knocked his glasses off.

"You're a very good listener, Molly Junior," he said, adjusting them on his nose again. "Let me see your sketch." He took it from her without much enthusiasm, puckering his eyes to look at it. "Why, Molly, you don't mean to tell me that's what you've done! It's most extraordinary—most extraordinary!

I didn't expect anything like this. It shows exceptional talent, exceptional talent, I should say. You've caught the spirit of the place. I like the way you've done the glistening water. And you've got remarkable distance in it. It's a good bit of composition, that moss-grown bough in the foreground, and the white church with the sun on it shining from across the creek. But what in the world are those fantastic gray things you've made floating in the air? I don't understand those at all."

Molly laughed. "They're the spirits Grandfather saw the night of the earthquake. They came out of their graves around the churchyard and danced over the river."

"Humph," said Mr. Oliphant. "All I can say is you've caught the spirit of the place most remarkably, and your spirits add to it. They're here, all right. I feel 'em if I don't see 'em. Where did you learn to do it?"

"Why, I just did it for the fun of the thing. It isn't anything."

"Isn't it?" said Mr. Oliphant. "Have you any more of them?"

"A room full up in the attic."

"I want to see them. Your eyes dance like your grandmother's, Molly Junior, even if they are brown."

"Jane's are blue," said Molly. "She's coming home from school to-day. She should be there when we get back. Let's hurry."

It was just dusk when they reached Alloway House. Behind the straight slim boles of the pine trees to the

west the sky was a sheet of flame, and shadowless gold light filled all the clearing around the house. To the east the trees were a wall of darkness, black and sombre, night already. The wild doves were "coming in," seeking shelter for the night in the isolated oak trees which dotted the big field in front of the house. Robert had been shooting and the setters were still ranging the field, running around in circles and stiffening now and then to a point where a bird had fallen and the scent still lingered.

A little car was chugging into the yard.

"There she comes," exclaimed Molly, and darted away, leaving Mr. Oliphant to care for the two horses.

"Very like her grandmother in many ways," he muttered, "very much indeed. But the times have changed. What am I to do with these animals?"

CHAPTER III

THE OLD ICE IS BROKEN

DINNER was still a ceremonious meal at Alloway House, in spite of the deal table on which it was eaten and the patched apron in which Mom Clio served it. She served it with a deftness she had learned in other days, and the family discarded their working clothes before they came to it. It was a symbol to them that though they might live the life of day-laborers, yet they were not "letting go" of the traditions and manners of their ancestors. Five minutes before the hour they gathered formally in the Yellow Room.

Mr. Oliphant was the first there that evening. He felt his way carefully down the wide stairs, step by step, holding on to the bannisters with one hand and lifting his candle above his peering eyes with the other. In the high hall of Alloway House its light was lost, only a nimbus of brightness in the surrounding dark. In the Yellow Room, too, the light of the lamp on the centre table in front of the fire dimmed away to nothing before it reached the corners. But it shone brightly on the two spots where "Governor Robert and Jane, his wife," had formerly hung.

Mr. Oliphant sighed as he looked at them.

"It's very sad," he muttered, "very sad indeed. When I think of what it used to be! When I think of

Molly Prioleau I wonder whether things always happen for the best."

His host came into the room a few minutes after him. He was a stately looking old gentleman, with white hair and bushy eyebrows. He walked a little stiffly from a wound received in the war. His manner was formal.

"Down before me, Joe? I apologize for keeping you waiting. Little Jane, my madcap granddaughter, came home from school this evening, and I fear she detained me too long."

"I heard her arrive, all laughter and delight. I only caught a glimpse of her in the distance as she and Molly ran into the house. Is she like her sister?"

"In the cast of her features, yes. But she is more of a Prioleau. She has Molly's coloring and vivacity.—Molly Prioleau's."

"I am looking forward to seeing her."

Mr. Alloway glanced up at him as he leaned forward in his chair to poke the fire. Mr. Oliphant was staring at the carpet, his eyes twitching behind his glasses. The name had checked the conversation and neither of them spoke for some instants. Mr. Alloway broke the silence at last, when it was becoming oppressive.

"It's been a mistake, Joe," he said. "We've had too few friends, or at least I have. You with your fame may not have needed me, but I've needed you."

Mr. Oliphant shook his head, straightening up in his chair.

"I haven't many friends. Of the old crowd there

are only you and Jim Alden left, and the new ones aren't the same somehow. It has been a mistake, Bob, and it was only breaking the ice that counted after all. If we had had the courage to do it sooner!" A peal of laughter rang through the house. "I guess I've needed you most," he said, turning his head to listen. "They're a fine set, Bob; you must be proud of them."

Mr. Alloway settled back in his chair, lifting his stiff foot on to the fender with his hands.

"Yes," he said smiling, "they're a fine set, all right, and I am proud of them. But you know, Joe," he stopped smiling and spoke slowly and thoughtfully, "that's the worst of the whole business. I shouldn't care for myself. Let the place go to ruin, let the negroes steal, what difference does it make to me? My life's gone anyhow, all that made it worth while. But these young people of mine. I can't give them the opportunities they ought to have. I can't give them the education I had. They've got to live in a hard generation. They must battle for their lives and I can't arm them. I should like them to take their proper place in the world, the place their ancestors had, but I can't fit them for it. The life they lead out here on the plantation is not what I should choose for them. I want culture for them and the beautiful things of this life. It's all very well for me, as I say. I have my memories.

"But other people's memories are poor food for young minds. It seems to content Robert well enough. He is developing into a good farmer. He handles the negroes well and gets a fair amount of work out of

them. He thinks he can pull the place into shape in time and make it pay. Perhaps he can, but it's a hard task. The negroes are slow to absorb new ideas, and since the war we have no way of imposing our will on them. Neither are they strictly honest. Last harvest this man Washington—you may have heard us speak of him—one of the most reliable men we have on the place, and quite the cleverest, cut the rice off the big field at Myrtle the day before Robert intended to gather it. Such occurrences are very discouraging—that cost us several hundred dollars—and they happen every year.”

“Discouraging!” exclaimed Mr. Oliphant, “discouraging, did you say? I call it disgraceful. Why don't you put a stop to it?”

Mr. Alloway laughed. “How are you going to do it? They get the stuff away over night.”

“Send the man to jail.”

Mr. Alloway shook his head. “One would have to jail them all. They are all the same.”

“Then jail them all. Send them away, lock, stock and barrel.”

Mr. Alloway made another long pause before he spoke.

“It is always an amazement to me,” he said at last, “how difficult it seems to be for a Northerner, even one who, like yourself, has been with us so much, to understand our feeling toward our negroes. To send them away is the last thing we should consider. It spells ruin for them. To go to the city is to go to perdition. These people have been on the plantation for

generations. We understand them and, in spite of their faults, we are fond of them, and they are fond of us. If we got another set they would have all the vices of these and none of their virtues.

"They're a good lot, really, these—as good as you'll find. They have no use for what they consider 'low down niggers.' Mom Clio's granddaughter went to the city and the old woman refuses to have her back, won't even hear her name mentioned. I'm not saying whether I think she's right or not. I'm merely telling you the fact. The result is I feel perfectly safe in letting the children go about the country freely. There isn't one of them who wouldn't take care of them."

He began to laugh. "I hear Mom Clio was regaling you with her 'sperrits' this morning. Get Molly to tell you some of her ghost stories. She has a clever way of mimicking the negroes."

"I'll ask her. She did a remarkably good sketch of Myrtle this afternoon. Remarkably good. Showed real talent, I thought. I should like to see some more of her work."

"I am sure she will be delighted to show them to you. She has done a number of attractive little things. She has a pretty taste, but nothing, I think, amounting to talent."

"Perhaps not! One can't judge from a half-hour sketch. But a straw shows which way the wind blows. What is she proposing to do with herself now she's grown up?"

Mr. Alloway looked at him in surprise. "Molly?" he repeated. "She will either marry or stay at home

here, I presume. I don't see what else she can do. It's not the girls' future I worry about. Their brothers will always take care of them somehow or other. Robert will be able to keep this roof over their heads, I trust, at the least. It's William who bothers me. The boy never complains, but he is getting restless. He has a more adventurous disposition than his brother, and he does not take to farming. That is, perhaps, as well, as there is not an opening on the plantation for both of them. But then I don't see an opening anywhere else. It has not been possible for me to educate him in one of the professions, which, of course, he should have been. He talks occasionally of wishing to get a position."

Mom Clio, shuffling in carpet slippers, announced that "Dinner am serbed."

CHAPTER IV

A FLOODED FIELD

"OH, Molly, come quick! The dyke's broken by the big field at Pimlico and the fish are pouring in. Get your rod and come quick!"

Jane came into the dining-room with a rush, her face glowing with excitement.

Molly looked up from the little squares of brightly colored material she was cutting and sorting to make a patchwork quilt.

"Oh, Janey, not another! That's the third in two years. Where is it?"

"Over by Pimlico. You never saw so many fish."

"But, Janey, that's the field Robert was planning to try wheat in. What will he ever do? He has all the seed and everything."

"Well, I can't help that! There's no use crying over spilt milk. Come on—let's fish."

"I can't. I've got to finish this. Mom Clio told me Hannah was cold last night and she had nothing to give her for an extra covering."

"Oh pshaw." Janey turned to Mr. Oliphant, who was reading the paper by the fire and now and then matching colors for Molly. "Won't *you* come? Somebody's got to. Honestly, you never say anything like it! They're thick!"

Mr. Oliphant blinked at her. "Thoroughly Prio-leau," he said. "Very impetuous, very. My dear young lady, I haven't understood a word you've said. Your invitation is to go fishing in a field? It sounds like excellent sport."

"I can tell you it isn't sport," exclaimed Molly. "It's another big field gone. The river eats them away one after another. Three in two years."

"Can't they be reclaimed?"

"Only by rebuilding the dykes. And we can't — Oh well, as Jane says, there's no use in crying over spilt milk. But I do hate to think how disappointed poor old Robert will be. He was counting so much on it."

"Well, I'm off. If you want to come, come. You'll lend him your rod, won't you, Moll?"

Jane rushed out of the room as she had rushed in and Mr. Oliphant followed her. She led the way down through the woods to the river and out along a narrow bank which jutted into the stream like a breakwater, dividing the river proper from what had lately been a field. Already the water there was several feet deep, brown and foamy. It came in through the gap with a gurgling noise, swirling and eddying, carrying with it hundreds of little fishes, whose silver sides, as they jostled against each other and leaped out of the water, glistened in the sunlight.

"Did you ever see anything like it!" exclaimed Jane. "Did you ever in your life?"

"Can't honestly say I did," admitted Mr. Oliphant, unwinding his reel. The fish jumped for the flies as

fast as they could cast them. At the end of half an hour Mr. Oliphant reeled in his line again and called a halt.

"We couldn't eat more than that in a week," he said, drawing out his sketch-book and leaning against a tree. "This is a very lovely spot you have brought me to, Jane, even if it is desolation."

"I suppose we ought to stop," Jane admitted reluctantly. "It is nice, isn't it?" She rested sideways against the tree and looked over Mr. Oliphant's shoulder. "What are you going to paint? It looks rather flat."

"That's what I'm going to paint, the flatness; the broad slow river, and the flooded fields and the low shore on the other side with a few big oaks on it like little hills—and that boat with the darky in it that's just coming around the bend there, and maybe that black buzzard with scoloped edge wings who's eaten so much already he's almost too lazy to dive for more. Think that ought to be pretty?"

"Yes. It ought to be if you do it as well as Molly does."

"So you think Molly could do it very well, do you?"

"I'm sure she could. Molly'd rather paint than eat, I think. Isn't it funny?"

"Well, I don't know; some people are made that way, you know. Molly did a lovely thing at Myrtle yesterday."

"She showed it to me, but I wish she'd left out the ghosts. I like to forget them."

"Is that very difficult?"

"Yes, with Porgus around it is, naturally."

"Who's Porgus?"

"Don't you know Porgus? He's my—you'll have to ask Grandfather how many grand uncles. He built Alloway House two hundred years ago. He lives up in the little room in the third story, where he used to write his sermons. He was a clergyman, you know. But it's awfully cold up there and he wanders all around the house looking for fires. He came into my room once in the middle of the night when I was sick and had a fire all night. And I saw him, but I thought it was Mom Clio come to put a log on, till the morning when I spoke of it and she said she had not been there at all. She said, 'Lor' chile, you done dreamt about dis old woman, dat's wat you done.' And I said, 'So I did, Mom Clio.' Because, of course, you always laugh at ghosts to the negro. He throws chips at you if you disturb him. Since then I've slept with Molly, and when I hear him in the hall I hold on to one end of her pigtail. She's got an awfully comforting pigtail. Here come Grandpa and Robert."

Mr. Alloway was having a good deal of difficulty in making his way along the steep-sided bank. He was steadying himself against Robert's arm and feeling his way carefully with his stick. Jane jumped up and ran to help him.

"Oh, Grandfather, such wonderful fishing! Just see how many we've caught in no time at all."

The old gentleman hardly seemed to notice her, except that he took her arm. He looked out over the

flooded field. "Ten good acres gone," he said bitterly, stopping at the end of the broken dyke.

Robert was gnawing his fingers. "Twelve," he said. "I measured it when I ordered the seed wheat. It's a very heavy loss to us just now. I was counting on it. It means we'll have to let the roof go another year, I'm afraid, sir. The river is eating us away at a terrific rate. We shall have to consider seriously what is to be done about it."

"Build an ark," suggested Jane flippantly. "We're pretty nearly afloat already."

Robert turned toward her with a smile. "Hello, Kid, so you've retrieved one square meal from the ruin anyway. They're beauties. Wish I'd come in time to catch a few. They've passed in now and they're out of reach from the bank."

"I'll go get the boat," suggested Jane hopefully.

"Haven't time now; sorry, Kiddy. Maybe this evening. Where's Moll?"

"Making a patchwork quilt for Hannah."

Mr. Alloway gave an impatient exclamation. "Always working for these ungrateful negroes! Ben told me this morning that he saw the bank was beginning to go two days ago. Took great credit for his cleverness. But, of course, he never mentioned it, so he wouldn't have to mend it. Rather see it flooded than do an honest day's work. Come back to the house now, Robert, I want to determine the condition of the roof." He turned to Mr. Oliphant. "Will you come with us, Joe, or are you going to stay here a while longer?"

"I think we'll come, eh, Janey, if we can get a ride home?"

Mr. Alloway looked back at the field as they drove away. "Twelve acres! You'd better look after the condition of the inner dykes, Robert. They may give way under this pressure. Have you seen the roof yourself? If it's anything like as bad as Molly says, I don't see how it will be possible to let it go another year."

"No, I haven't been up to the attic."

"Molly's hung buckets under the worst places," said Jane.

"We'll go right up-stairs," said Mr. Alloway as they drove into the yard. "Come with us, Joe," he suggested. "You said you wanted to see some of Molly's sketches, and I should enjoy showing them to you. Her workshop is in the attic and you may remember from the old days how steep the stairs are up there. My knee will not permit me to climb them often."

He was panting before he reached the top of them. Tiny stars of daylight shone through the roof. He looked at them in dismay, leaning against the banisters to catch his breath.

"I had no idea it could be as bad as that! I thought Molly was exaggerating."

Robert began to gnaw his finger again. "It will do a great deal of damage if it isn't fixed at once. But ——"

"I don't see anything for it but to raise another mortgage," said his grandfather. "Do you think it is possible?"

Jane had taken the fish to the kitchen ; now she came running up the stairs two steps at a time.

“ Isn’t it awful ! ” she exclaimed. “ This is Molly’s studio, Mr. Oliphant. I told her you were up here and she’s coming in a few minutes.”

She opened the door and he followed her in.

CHAPTER V

MOLLY'S STUDIO

MOLLY'S studio was an unsheathed space under the slope of the roof. It was possible to stand up only in the very middle of it, and not possible there for a tall person. Two dormer windows at the ends of deep embrasures, one on either side of the room, let in a little uncertain light which, coming from opposite directions, made a kind of dazzling dusk in the centre, with criss-cross shadows and conflicting lights. A more unpromising place to paint in, it would have been hard to imagine.

The walls were covered with sketches, tacked at their upper corners and hanging down straight from the sloping roof. Mr. Oliphant walked slowly around looking at them. He had to put his face within a foot of them to see, with his short-sighted eyes, in the dim light. He wriggled his nose like a rabbit and blinked behind his glasses.

Jane thought he was delightful. Sitting cross-legged on a cushion on the floor close by one of the windows where Molly did most of her painting, she had an almost irresistible desire to laugh at him as she called out the subjects one after another. "That's the sunset through the trees from the front of the house.

That's the cattle shed. That's Robert driving the cows through the dipping pen. Isn't it great?"

"Delightful," said Mr. Oliphant. "Perfectly delightful. They're all delightful. The drawing is out. She has no idea of perspective but she catches the character of the country and the people most remarkably. And they show boldness of treatment. Crude in spots, of course. They would be. But they are charming. The haunting sadness of the flat misty fields. I have felt it a hundred times. And the snakiness of that swamp. Look at the patience of those women's backs, bending to the hot harvest! Most remarkable, I consider it. Has she ever had any lessons?"

"Only a few at school, from the French teacher who didn't know anything about drawing—nor about French either, for that matter."

"The wild abandon of that dance!" He went on from picture to picture. "Most remarkable."

In front of one, hung in the embrasure of the window, where the best light in the room fell on it, he gave an exclamation which brought Mr. Alloway and Robert in from the hallway.

"What have you discovered now, Joe?" asked Mr. Alloway.

"Discovered," cried Mr. Oliphant, "I've discovered a genius. Look at this thing! Look at the expression on those two faces. Why, they're talking! It's remarkable, Bob, perfectly remarkable. Why haven't you told me about it long ago? You ought to have sent her up to New York five years ago at the latest."

Mr. Alloway looked at the picture. "Mom Clio and Nancy. It is an attractive little thing. I remember thinking so when Molly showed it to me."

"Attractive!" exclaimed Mr. Oliphant. "I tell you it's a gem, a gem. Molly has most remarkable talent."

"Hardly that, I should think. She has a pretty taste certainly, and great facility with her brush, but hardly, I should say, talent."

"You don't know what you are talking about! I tell you she has talent, most remarkable talent. Among all the students I see, I don't find one in five years who has as much."

"I hardly know where she would get it," said her grandfather. "I never remember hearing that any member of the family had it."

"I don't care where she got it. All I know is that she has it. It's a crime it hasn't been developed. Why hasn't she had lessons?"

Mr. Alloway gave a slight shrug. "My dear Joe, why hasn't the house a new roof?"

"The roof go hang," said Mr. Oliphant. "What do I care about roofs?"

Jane pricked up her ears.

"I tell you she's got a future before her. If you want a new roof the surest way to get it is to develop that future."

"Are you serious, Mr. Oliphant?" asked Robert, incredulously. "Or are you joking?"

"I don't joke about such things. I say she must come up North and study."

"I wish she could," said Mr. Alloway. "As I told

you yesterday, I should like to give them every possible advantage if I could afford it. However, it's out of the question and, after all, the child probably gets as much satisfaction out of her sketching now as she would if she had studied for years."

Mr. Oliphant's nose wriggled so hard his glasses dropped off and fell jingling against the buttons of his coat at the end of their black ribbon.

"You don't know what you're talking about! I say she must come North."

"It's out of the question," repeated her grandfather.

"You've a small imagination. If you say that, it's because you don't understand. I tell you she has a great future before her. She's got genius, Bob, genius. Do you know what that means?"

"I'm not sure that I do," admitted her grandfather, turning away with a laugh. "Don't let's talk any more about it, Joe. I tell you it's out of the question."

"But is it, Grandfather?" asked Robert. "If Mr. Oliphant is right, and he should know if anybody does, why, Molly ought to go. William and I can patch the roof somehow, and you can use the mortgage money that way instead."

"It's out of the question, Robert. I don't care to speak of it any more. If I had all the money in the world I should not consent to Molly's going up to the North alone. Besides, she's needed here."

"I could take her place all right," said Jane.

Her grandfather looked at her with an expression she resented.

"Well, I could, perfectly," she insisted.

"Suppose she were to marry; you'd have to get on without her," said Mr. Oliphant.

"Of course, I should never consider interfering with the children's natural destiny."

"But to paint is Molly's natural destiny."

Molly herself came up the stairs at that minute, and Mr. Oliphant turned to her.

"Molly, how would you like to come to New York and study painting?"

Her face lighted up. "Oh, Grandfather, can I?"

"No, you cannot."

She turned away with a little shrug and a half smile.

Mr. Oliphant sat down on the table, pushing the only chair in the room toward Mr. Alloway. "Look here, Bob," he said. "Let's talk this thing out sensibly. I'm sure of what I say. That girl's got more talent than any one in fifty artists who make a success of the thing. I know it. But I can see you wouldn't feel justified in gambling on the soundness of my judgment to the extent of raising a mortgage on the place. And there isn't any need of it. Molly could get a scholarship at any of the Art Schools to-morrow. But she mustn't. I want her education under my own eye. I want to teach her the use of her tools and the general principles of art. I want to give her the opportunity to see the best things and then let her develop along her own lines. Let me do it, Bob. I have no scholarship in my class or she should have it. But let her come, Bob. Let her come because of what you said yesterday. It has been a mistake. Let her come for the sake of old times. I'd love to do it for your grand-

daughter—and Molly Prioleau's," he added half under his breath.

"There'd still be her living, my dear Joe."

"I'm coming to that. I have to have a monitor for my classes. It is practically a scholarship. I give the position to a girl with talent who can't afford to pay, and she gets her tuition for the work she does. Instead of her tuition, let me give Molly her board. I know a house where she can stay and be well looked after. And I'll see that she has a good time. Just the time you would want her to have. Jim Alden's daughter is studying at my place. A brilliant girl. She'll go a long way, but not as far as Molly. She's just about Molly's age and I'll warrant her friendship. Now look here, Bob, there isn't a possible objection you can make that won't prove you either stubborn or selfish. Selfish, I say. It will keep you awake nights if you hold that child back from whimsiness, sheer whimsiness, and nothing else. I'm done. I wash my hands of it. If you don't want to send her, don't!"

"I should like to, Joe, but ——"

"I should think we might manage it, Grandfather," said Robert.

"You do, do you? Well, I don't. I don't consider it is a fitting plan at all for my granddaughter. However, I don't wish to be stubborn or selfish, as Joe says I will be. I'll leave it entirely to your Aunt Jane. If she considers it fitting, I shall make no further objection. If she does not, I don't wish it mentioned again. Shall we go down, Joe?"

The two girls stayed up-stairs in the studio.

"My word," said Jane, looking curiously at the picture of Mom Clio. "So that's the sort of thing a genius does. To think that's you. What do you suppose a monitor is?"

"I have no idea."

"I hope it's something Aunt Jane will approve of."

"I'm afraid it isn't."

"You take pay for it. She'll say it's 'going into service' or something dreadful. She'll never consider it fitting, that's sure."

She came over and put her arms around her sister's neck. "Poor Moll, I'm so sorry. But maybe you can do pretty well at home if you really are a genius. I've read that they do."

Molly was close to tears. "I wish it hadn't been suggested," she said. "I never thought of it before. But now — Oh well, let's forget it. Aunt Jane's sure to say no."

"I'm going to get after Robert," announced Jane.

"What's the use of that?"

"Don't know that there is any, but I'm going to try."

She sought him out that evening, by himself. "Molly was crying because she couldn't study painting," she said.

"Poor Moll!"

"Do you remember that day when I was just a kid, and you were trying to decide about giving up college so we could build the barn, and I discovered you over by the river, crying? You were awfully ashamed and made me promise not to tell. But I was proud of you when you came back and said you hated lessons and

wouldn't go to college. I know you think I'm a kid still, Robert, because I act like such a fool. But I've never forgotten that. I've kept it in my mind that maybe we'd all have to do the same thing, one after another. It's Molly's turn now, and—I don't like it, Robert, if I am a kid. I'm nearly sixteen. And I could take Molly's place, even if Grandfather does look at me as if I were a snail! You know I cry easily, Robert, but Molly cries hard."

"I haven't seen her do it for ten years, I guess. Poor little Moll! Aunt Jane will never think it's proper."

"Suppose you do some thinking," suggested Jane. And having said her say, she vanished.

CHAPTER VI

MR. OLIPHANT HOES THE GROUND

"AND I believe her to be a real genius—blue heart of the flame—the very heart of it," Mr. Oliphant looked around the table at his hearers aggressively, as though defying contradiction. None of them took up his challenge. Mrs. Alden smiled somewhat vaguely, as though she had not been paying very close attention. Adelaide rested her elbows on the table and looked across at him, with an incredulous little lift at the corners of her lips, but said nothing. Her father seemed genuinely interested.

"Bob Alloway's granddaughter," he exclaimed. "How that does take me back. Not his daughter, but his granddaughter. By Jove! that makes me feel like Methuselah! Molly Prioleau's granddaughter. Is she as beautiful as her grandmother? Not that there's any use asking *you* that question. If Helen of Troy were to come back you wouldn't allow even her the right of comparison."

"She is a very charming child. A mere child. Hardly more. More of an Alloway than a Prioleau. Totally undeveloped, however. Reminds one of a wood flower." He looked across at Adelaide. "I'm counting on you to bring her out. Take her under your wing. I've promised her you will. You have no idea what an adventure a winter in New York can

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seem to a little girl like that. If I had not promised her your friendship I doubt if she could have got up her courage to come."

"Shy wood flower and blue flame-heart! I can't quite picture the combination." Adelaide's laugh sounded the least little bit mocking.

Mr. Oliphant blinked uneasily behind his glasses. Had he been too sure of her welcome for Molly?

"Your father and I are indebted to her family for many good times, I can tell you," he said sharply. "And she'll repay you. She is going a long way, I predict. The day will come when you'll be proud to be able to say you helped her."

Adelaide was still mocking. "I'm flattered you should credit me with such beautiful unselfishness. So I'm to tend this blue heart-flame until it becomes strong enough to dim my own poor light, and then I'm to be humbly proud, am I?"

"Adelaide!"

"Well, I really do object to this blue heart-flame business. My own heart's got a flame too, you know. You've told me so yourself, Uncle Joe, lots of times."

"Quite right, my dear, I have. But you must remember that a great genius is not born in the world once in five hundred years."

"The trouble is you don't look for them in the right place, Uncle Joe." Adelaide's eyes gleamed teasingly. "I've heard that genius and insanity ——" A call to the telephone interrupted her. "Excuse me, Mamma." She got up and left the room.

"Adelaide is too absurd about her painting," said her

mother. "I really don't approve but I can't do anything with her, especially as her father encourages her. I wish you wouldn't put it into her head to spell art with capital letters, Joe."

"But, my dear lady, if you want a thing to stand out you've got to spell it in capital letters."

Adelaide came back. "That was Mary Carmichael," she said. "She's had a cable. Allen's sailed." Her face flushed slightly.

"At last!" exclaimed her mother.

"How long has he been away, Adelaide?" asked Mr. Oliphant.

"Four years next May."

"A lifetime," he laughed at her.

"I suppose he'll have changed considerably," said Mrs. Alden.

"He'll have changed from a boy to a man at least, I should hope," answered her husband. "Perhaps he'll be ready to settle down and do some work now. Of all the absurd ideas, for a young man to spend four of the most important years of his life gadding about the world like that! Most unfortunate he should have had such a mother."

"She was a very sweet woman, Jim. And with Allen, of course, it was only a question of his own happiness."

"Not at all. It's a question of character."

"Will you still be willing to take him into your office?"

"Certainly, if he wants to come. I think very highly of Allen's ability, if it hasn't run to seed."

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"I'm afraid it won't be a question of what he wants," said Mrs. Alden. "You know Mary said he was coming home because he was not well."

Mr. Alden gave an angry grunt. "Ruined in mind and body."

Mr. Oliphant blinked at him through his glasses. "Jim, I should never have thought you would grow into such a materialistic pessimist, or pessimistic materialist, whichever you prefer. I can imagine three years in Africa might have done the boy a great deal of good."

"I'm merely practical, Joe. You've lived in the land of dreams and memories all your life, whereas I've lived in the world of men and women. And if you're going to lead this daughter of mine into regions where art is spelled with capital letters, that's all the more reason why I should continue to be practical."

"Wait!" exclaimed Adelaide. "I got left behind somehow. I thought we were still talking about Allen Carmichael. When did we change?"

Her mother looked at her reprovingly. "Don't be absurd, Adelaide."

"We never did change, my dear," said Mr. Oliphant, laughing at her.

"I'm on Daddy's side," she said. "No lands of dreams and memories for me."

Her mother pushed back her chair. "I think we will go up-stairs, Jim, while you have your cigars. The smoke irritates my throat."

Mr. Oliphant detained Adelaide. "You will be good to my Molly?"

"Of course I will. I'll do everything I can for her. And she'll have to make me awfully jealous, to make me jealous at all."

"You have no need to be jealous, my dear. You have enough talent to brave comparison with anybody. And if she should turn out to have more than you have, remember how much more of everything else you have." His eyes twinkled at her behind his glasses. "Don't forget that Allen's coming home."

"The land of dreams and memories," she laughed at him.

"The land of dreams and—hopes," he answered, holding the door back for her. He opened it again after he had closed it. "Tit for tat," he called.

Adelaide laughed again, but she was serious when she joined her mother in the library. "I don't like it, Mamma, I wish you wouldn't."

"Wouldn't what?"

"Wouldn't tease me about Allen."

"I don't think I teased you. It was your uncle. Besides, why should you mind?"

"You encouraged him by seeming to take it all for granted. That's what I mind."

Her mother looked at her seriously. "Everybody is going to take it for granted, Adelaide."

"No, I don't want them to."

"But they will. Why shouldn't they? There never was any secret about it. Don't you, yourself?"

"I? What I do has nothing to do with what other people can do."

"But don't you?" Her mother came over to the

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chair in which she was sitting and rested her hands on the arm of it, looking down. "I've been wanting to ask you that for a long time, daughter. Do you, or don't you?"

Adelaide got up with a shrug of her shoulders. "I can't tell you that, Mamma. It's a long time, four years. And he may have changed, as you said yourself. We'll have to see. He and I. Mamma, please! Remember it's only between him and me, and not for outsiders at all."

"You have certainly changed, yourself, Adelaide. I don't understand you any more. I can never seem to get in touch with you, as I used to when you were a child."

Adelaide put her arms around her and kissed her. "Never mind, Mumsie dear. We're pretty well in touch on everything else. Let's keep away from that subject."

CHAPTER VII

IN SPITE OF GREAT-AUNT JANE

A MIRACLE had happened! Great-aunt Jane had been overruled. Robert had done it. Aunt Jane said quite emphatically that it was a most unfitting plan for Molly to go North; not to be thought of, much less spoken of. Yet right in the face of her disapprobation Robert went on thinking and talking till the miracle happened, and here was Molly actually installed in New York.

Great-aunt Jane was the nearest relative the young Alloways had, and she had had complete charge of that part of their education which needed a feminine touch. She was an old lady of much worldly wisdom and wide experience—this had always been impressed upon them with great care by their grandfather. Before the war she had come North every year, and had been to Europe twice. Since the war she seldom left the old house and garden on the East Battery, save to go out once every year or two to Alloway Place, where the general decay made her miserable and low-spirited for months afterward. But she kept pace with the rising generation. She took great pains to do so. She had her great-nieces' friends from the Confederate School, where all the nicest Southern girls were educated, and her great-nephews' friends from the Military Acad-

emy, which was second to none in the country save West Point, and not very much second to that, at her home continually, and encouraged them to talk to her as much as they would. Then during the tourist season, which was becoming well defined and popular, she spent a great deal of time at her window watching the doings of the visitors. Occasionally she met some of them at the house of a friend, or at the old Powder House which was now the Headquarters of the Colonial Dames. Once in a great while, even, she invited a few of them to her own house. On these occasions she scrutinized them very closely, with bright eyes which, without seeming to look, took in every detail and searched down deep below the surface, and she asked the politest questions which went direct to the point and illuminated it for good or ill with all the mercilessness of a searchlight. Most strangers were a little afraid of her, she made them feel gauche and boorish. But a chosen few admitted she could be very sweet; that she was in fact a dear old lady and that her keen tongue was a wholesome tonic—good manners take time, and the North hurries so.

Still advising though her main advice had been disregarded, Great-aunt Jane had given Molly many wise instructions and prohibitions by which to guide her course in the North. For one thing, Molly would better not go out in the streets alone. She had heard that Northerners did it, and in fact the younger generation did it even in Charleston, though only on certain streets, and of course never after sundown. But for her part, she considered it a fashion to be discouraged.

Besides which Charleston was a smaller place than New York and everyone knew the young ladies there by sight, whereas in New York Molly would be a stranger, and must therefore be most careful that her behavior was in all things such as became a lady of her standing. Decidedly it would be wiser for her not to go into the streets alone, at least until she became known, so that the people she met would not wonder who she was.

Molly had promised faithfully and sincerely to obey all her aunt's instructions, yet here within four hours of her arrival she was breaking the first of them!

She felt rather breathless as she closed the front door behind her and stood on the steps of Mrs. Clendenning's house, to which Mr. Oliphant had brought her that morning, and looked out over Washington Square. It was quite appalling to think of herself alone in the midst of all the hurry and crowd of which she had heard so much, although her immediate surrounding seemed familiar and reassuring enough. The little Square with its white arch, its swaying trees and groups of playing children might well, except for the aching cold and the icicles which fringed the balconies of the surrounding houses, have been within a hundred yards of the Battery on which Great-aunt Jane's house faced.

But the cold was a pain! It made her nose ache. She held the little old sable muff, which Great-aunt Jane had given her as a parting gift, up to her face and ran down the steps, very resolute not to show she was afraid, and no matter what happened, to be at

the studio at the hour Mr. Oliphant had told her to be there.

Nothing much did happen, except that taking the inside of the sidewalk as a matter of course, in spite of its being the left, she collided with an old gentleman, who, raising his eyes, muttered absent-mindedly "nice pink cheeks" and nearly scared her home again; and at Fourteenth Street, she was nearly run over, and a truck driver roared something at her and two or three people turned and looked at her and laughed, which made her feel very red and uncomfortable. But at Twenty-third Street a policeman took her by the elbow and piloted her through the maelstrom of vehicles and told her how to cross Madison Square and get to Fourth Avenue, and after that she began to feel quite bold again and to enjoy herself. She had grown warm and had forgotten that cold could hurt. The air had a quality she had never felt before, crisp and tingling. The bells in the tower rang out as she passed under it, and she held her breath to listen, almost awestruck as she threw her head back and looked at the white shaft that rose up, up into the blue winter sky. Nobody had told her the city was like this!

The shabbiness of Number 3—Fourth Avenue, which was Mr. Oliphant's address, gave her some misgivings. The lower windows were piled high with second-hand furniture and the shades up-stairs hung torn and askew, the paint was mostly gone and there were chips in the stonework. She remembered a second of Aunt Jane's precepts; never, never, under any circumstance to go into any house she wasn't sure of.

But Mr. Oliphant had told her to come, so she screwed up her courage and went in. A man in his shirt-sleeves pointed to a dark staircase and she went up two flights. At the top she found thick rugs on the floor and tapestries on the wall and carved furniture standing about, so she knew she was right. But there were a dozen different doors and she did not know which to knock at. While she was hesitating what to do, one of them opened and Mr. Oliphant appeared.

"Well, Molly Alloway," he exclaimed, "here you are at last."

"Here I am," she answered with a smile that trembled a little. The relief of seeing him made her realize how frightened she had been. And yet the relief was not as great as it might have been. After all he was not much more than a stranger.

He took her hand. "I'm very glad to see you, my dear. Have you been out here in the hall long?"

"No. I was just wondering which was your door."

"My ——? The whole place is mine. I rent the lower floor as an auction room, and the rest I use in one way or another—or leave empty. Here's where my men's classes paint. Your room is down-stairs, right below mine in the corner. Those little rooms down that corridor I use to store things in, or sometimes if one of my students needs a quiet place to work—or occasionally I let some unfortunate who's down on his luck bunk there—there are two or three now, I believe, poor fellows. It's a barn of a place. I'll show you round another time. Come into my room,

now, and tell me about everything. You have no idea how glad I am to see you, Molly, no idea at all. There! my dear, take your things off and make yourself comfortable. This is your home now, you know. Let me see, where can you put them where they won't get dirty? There! On that pile of stuff on the table. Those are my backgrounds. Wonderful pieces some of them. You'll love them. You're going to take care of them for me now, and see about getting them cleaned up a bit. They need it. They certainly need it. But I can't trust many people with them."

Molly, carefully balancing Aunt Jane's muff on top of her coat so it shouldn't touch anything, thought the whole place needed it woefully. They were in a sort of narrow antechamber, divided from the main room by a heavy curtain of green brocade, spotted and paint-smearred. Without even looking at it closely, Molly could see the moth grubs following the threads of the pattern. The inlaid table on which she put her things had lost half its top. Everywhere beautiful things pushed and crowded each other; glass and marble and bronze, etchings and books and ivories. On the top of a Chinese wedding-chest, a green-blue Ushabti from Egypt shone like an exotic flower in the midst of a group of brown Tanagra figurines; from a corner, one of Luca della Robbia's *Bambini* stared solemnly out at the dustiness.

Mr. Oliphant followed Molly's gaze to it. "Lovely thing, isn't it, Molly? It's genuine too. I found it — But come, I'll tell you that another time. I'm a garrulous old gentleman when I get talking about my treas-

ures. But you'll love them as much as I do, soon. You'll see! You'll see!"

He led the way around the end of the dividing curtain, stopping to close a drawer from which a cascade of lace was falling to the ground.

"Help me put them back, will you, my dear? You're going to have your hands full,—with things that will make an artist of you just by handling them."

On the other side of the curtain the studio proper, a big room, flooded with cold shadowless light from a tall north window, looked as empty and spacious as the anteroom looked small and crowded. There seemed to be nothing but pictures in it. They hung over the tapestries on the wall, leaned against the surbase, stood on the easels and were propped against the few tables and chairs. Only a divan under the big window was free of them, and to this Mr. Oliphant led Molly.

"Now sit down and tell me all about it. You said you had a good trip and your grandfather was well? Nearly changed his mind at the last moment about letting his little Molly go so far away, I'll be bound. It's a good thing he didn't quite change it. An exceedingly good thing! I'm counting on great things from you, Molly. You're going to make your mark in the world. Wonderful quality in those sketches of yours, wonderful for someone who hasn't been taught anything. That's an ugly thing, isn't it?" He pointed to an unfinished portrait on one of the easels.

"Fawlder, the button king. Stupid face, very. Never could have made his fortune if he hadn't in-

herited it. Interesting to paint though. That's a remarkable thing, Molly, a stupid face is interesting to paint. You want to find something worth while. It's generally there. I haven't found it yet, but I will. I like the fingers of the left hand already, and the back of the head, the way it goes round. It does go round, doesn't it—like an orange?"

"Yes, it does go round," agreed Molly.

They were the first words she had spoken since she came into the room. Mr. Oliphant felt the shyness in her voice. He let his nose-glasses fall off, jingling against the buttons of his coat.

"Always keep that in mind, my dear. Think more of the back of the head, which you can't see, than you do of the front. Are you comfortable at Mrs. Clendenning's? I've known her for a long time, and I think you will like her. There's a sketch here I did of her—somewhere—if I can find it. Here's a book of some of the things I've done at various times. Look over them while I wash my brushes. Then we'll go down-stairs and see Adelaide Alden. She's packing a picture to submit to the Academy. It won't be accepted but it will draw her very favorably to the attention of the Committee. That's Mrs. Clendenning. Like her, isn't it? That's my sister. It's in the museum at Pittsburgh. There's another one of her at the Metropolitan, but they are neither of them as good as that one on the wall by the end of the curtain. Look at the corners of the mouth. You can see them twitch, and the tip of her nose crinkle as she laughs, can't you? Whistled as I painted that." He whistled again as he

looked at it. "Now let's go down-stairs and see Adelaide."

He led the way to a door directly under his own.

"You know who Adelaide is, don't you? Jim Alden's daughter. You've heard your grandfather and me speak of him, I'm sure. Used to be down in South Carolina in the old days. Charlie, his elder brother, was our crony. Jim was the baby, and was only allowed to worship and envy—and do our errands—when he was good."

The room below was divided like Mr. Oliphant's own, by a heavy curtain, to the end of which Adelaide came when the door opened.

"Here's Molly Alloway," said Mr. Oliphant. "This is Adelaide Alden."

Molly liked Adelaide's cordial smile. It chased the homesickness back a little. And her words were cordial, too.

"I'm so glad you've come. I've been waiting, and I was beginning to be afraid that you weren't going to get here this afternoon. I was very much disappointed, because you know Uncle Joe has been telling us wonderful things about you."

Molly smiled and flushed. "I hope he hasn't said more than I can live up to."

"Is your picture packed yet, Adelaide? If not, I should like Molly to see it."

"The cover isn't down yet, no. It's round in the big room. Come and see it." Again her smile was very cordial. Molly liked her.

Adelaide propped her picture up against an easel

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where the light fell on it, showing the face of a child, smiling, half afraid. There were some crude spots in it, some touches of the amateur not yet eliminated, but in spite of them it was good, and it seemed to Molly more wonderful than all Mr. Oliphant's own pictures. One expected fine things from him, and took them for granted, like the sunlight, and the beauty of a flower. But this was done by a girl like herself, no older, if as old. Molly looked at her with new curiosity, feeling for the first time in her life the spur of competition. Mr. Oliphant saw it flash in her eyes and smiled to himself.

"Well, I'm going to leave you two, now," he said. "I've got work to do up-stairs. Adelaide, you'll help Molly learn her way around a bit, won't you? Tell her what stuff she'll have to get and where to get it, and that sort of thing. Good-bye, my dear, I shall see you here in the morning."

"I think it's wonderful," said Molly, when he had gone. "You're sending it to the Academy, aren't you? Mr. Oliphant told me."

"Did he say whether he thought it would be accepted?"

Molly wished she hadn't mentioned it. "He said it would make a favorable impression on the judges, whether they accepted it or not."

"Oh dear! I know he doesn't think it will be accepted. It's such a long time now. You're starting on an up-hill road, you know, Miss Alloway."

"But think of the top," exclaimed Molly.

Adelaide laughed a little cynically. "Unfortunately very few ever see the top."

"I don't see why you should say that. You're pretty nearly there."

"I? No. I've come a long way, but there is still further than that to go, and sometimes I don't feel as though it were worth going. I'm not very likely to reach it, after all."

"I don't see how you can say that." Molly was looking at the picture with an unmistakably sincere admiration, which pleased Adelaide.

"But I'm not, you know. Just think how few really have reached it. You could count them on your fingers. Uncle Joe doesn't consider he has. He's always improving and studying and striving. You're going to tell me that effort is happiness in itself, and that the minute you reach the peak your doll turns to sawdust—kind of mixed, but never mind. It's all very well, but I don't feel that way. I want to achieve something at least once. Then I think I could sit back and be happy and restful. I don't want to strive always and never succeed."

"It all depends on what you call success, I suppose," objected Molly. "If you don't think Mr. Oliphant achieves!"

"Oh, he does of course, in a sense. But I don't call it achievement as long as someone is doing better than you are. I suppose I'm very ambitious."

"Well, they say you ought to aim at the moon if you want to hit the church steeple."

Adelaide laughed, peeling her apron over her head.

"Would you like to walk up-town and have tea with

us? We'll stop on the way and buy the things you need. You haven't anything, have you?"

"No, I have never painted in oils."

"You have a sweet time ahead of you then!"

As Molly followed Adelaide out of the door it occurred to her, for the first time, that perhaps even sables might get old-fashioned.

CHAPTER VIII

INHERITED FRIENDS

MOLLY ALLOWAY was very much interested in what was going on around her as she sat in the Alden drawing-room late that afternoon.

It had grown dark and intensely cold before she and Adelaide reached the house. She had come in shivering and miserable, and the big room with the electric lights sparkling on the prisms of the chandelier, the heavy shimmering curtains drawn over the windows, the scent of unseasonable flowers in the air, and the fire burning on the white hearth, had seemed to her a fairy place. It reminded her of the "Acts of the Ancestors." At home among the ruins it seemed, though one really knew that it still existed in that wide, indefinite region, "the North," as though luxury had gone from the world. It was very amusing to find oneself in the midst of it.

Mrs. Alden called her to sit beside her on the sofa where she was pouring tea. She said she felt as though Molly was an old friend already, her husband had talked so much about all her family and the good times they had given him in the old days in South Carolina, and then, lately, Mr. Oliphant had told them a great deal about Molly herself and the wonderful promise her talent showed. She hoped Molly and Adelaide would be great friends.

It was very pleasant to be welcomed so cordially.

The general talk was moving too fast and on too unfamiliar ground for Molly to follow it. She sat back and listened, and watched and smiled.

There were half a dozen other guests in the room. There was one old lady, Miss Eustis, who was rather patronizing to Molly at first, looking at her through her lorgnettes as though she suspected her of being one of Adelaide's queer friends from the studio, till she heard she was one of "the Alloways" and then she became very gracious. She said she remembered a friend of hers telling her about a visit she had paid to Alloway House before the war and of the gay times they had there. There was another old lady with a sweet face, Mrs. Phelps; and there were two girls, Miss Jones and Miss Winslow, one of whom had an insipid expression and the other a bright one, but Molly became confused and couldn't remember which was which. Then there were a brother and sister, Mary and Allen Carmichael, who were evidently intimate friends of Adelaide.

Allen Carmichael had been big game shooting in Africa and was telling stories of his adventures. Molly did not think he could possibly mean them to be believed. If they were true he must be a wonderful person to have kept his head and his skin in some of the situations he described. He had been taken sick out there and invalided home. At least he said he had. But the girls insisted it was an excuse on his part so he could loaf for another year or two. Molly wondered whether it was. He certainly didn't look sick,

but then neither did he look as though he would particularly enjoy loafing. The only conclusion she reached was that she liked his face and that he stood teasing very well.

She liked his sister's face, too. It wasn't pretty at all, but she thought it unusually attractive, broad and intelligent and good-natured. It had such a pleasant smile as she looked at her brother.

Mr. Alden came in after a while.

He exclaimed when he was introduced to her, "Molly Alloway! I certainly am glad to see you, Miss Molly. We've been quite impatient for your arrival ever since Joe Oliphant told us you were coming. Let me look at you and see if I can find your grandmother in you,—not in your features, and certainly not in your coloring. She was a most attractive person, Miss Molly."

"And there's not the least bit of her in me?" inquired Molly.

Laughter went round the room. Adelaide smiled a sort of proprietary smile, and Allen noticed Molly for the first time since he had been introduced to her. Miss Eustis looked at her through her lorgnettes with a surprised expression and slightly raised her eyebrows.

Mr. Alden bowed. "I beg your pardon, Miss Molly, I said you had not her features nor her coloring. The likeness in general characteristics I find most marked." He brought his teacup over and sat down beside her. "And I predict it will become more and more marked as the winter goes on—You know

everybody in sight was always in love with her, from the little black piccaninnies, who didn't count, up through me, who didn't count either, to all the young blades and gray-haired venerables in the state, with poor old Joe, and lucky Bob Alloway at their head. I should like to see Bob again. I wonder whether he remembers me. When you write tell him you've been to Charlie Alden's brother's house. He'll remember Charlie all right. He ought to come and see us. Tell him that too."

"I know he hasn't forgotten you. He said he hoped I should see you. You used to stay at the Leas' at Pimlico, didn't you?"

"Yes, mostly. But it didn't make any difference where we stayed, at Pimlico, or Myrtle, or Alloway, or Ranleigh, we all spent our days together anyhow. And fine days they were too. There aren't many of the old crowd left now. Charlie Lea was killed at Appomattox, and Lea Manigault at the Bloody Corner. What became of little Marjorie Manigault? She and I were great cronies. When the big ones wouldn't let us play with them we consoled each other."

"Cousin Marjorie is living in Paris. She has never come back since the war." Molly laughed, finding herself back amid the familiar "Acts of the Ancestors." She kept the whole company listening to them, sitting up very straight and stiff at the end of the big sofa with Aunt Jane's muff held carefully on her lap in front of her. Once, when Allen moved away from in front of it, she caught sight of herself in the long mirror, and momentarily she wondered

whether a clever needle could make her look more like other people. But she dismissed the question at once as unimportant. What one had and what one wore in the South were matters of fate, and not among the things one worried about. She went on talking in her soft low voice, with a touch of liquid in it caught from the negroes, and the verdict of everyone when she left was that she was charming.

Mrs. Alden kissed her and told her to come and go in the house as though it were her own. Miss Eustis asked her to dinner, studying her through her lorgnettes and planning whom she should ask to meet her. Mary Carmichael offered to take her home.

"We're neighbors, you know," she said. "We're only three doors from Mrs. Clendenning on Washington Square."

The long vista of the Avenue, with the two lines of light stretching away till they almost met in the distance, fascinated Molly; she was silent looking out at it.

"How do you like us, the first day?" asked Allen.

"Oh, I love you," she exclaimed.

Mary laughed at her. "That seems like rather a bold statement on such short acquaintance."

Molly stuck to it. "It's love at first sight! Look at that! Is there anything like it anywhere? Maybe there is, but I tell you it's not in Charleston, the dear old place."

It was late and the jam had loosened on the Avenue. They ran down its length with hardly a pause.

"Thanks ever so much for the drive," said Molly

as they stopped in front of Mrs. Clendenning's door.

"I can't tell you how much I enjoyed it."

"Come in to tea to-morrow afternoon, and tell us how much you enjoyed your first day's work," suggested Mary.

"Thanks, I will."

Allen smiled as he settled back beside his sister in the car. "There's something refreshing about a little enthusiasm nowadays, isn't there?" he said.

"She's delightful," agreed Mary. "If only she doesn't get spoiled."

"She'll take some spoiling," said Allen.

Molly ran up-stairs to her room and went to her window to look out at the Park, with the moon floating in the sky above the arch, and the lighted cross on the church opposite shining over the tree-tops. Decidedly she loved it all. She was still a little homesick, but in spite of that she loved it and she wouldn't go back again for anything. She sat down to write to Jane.

"Dearest Janey: I miss you dreadfully, but it's great, perfectly great, and you've simply got to come up in the spring and see it. But my clothes won't do at all. I must see what I can do to them. I shall begin this very minute, as I'm going out to tea to-morrow and I must work all day so I won't have any time then. Therefore you'll have to wait for a real letter. This is just to tell you I'm here and happy and wanting you."

Already she had begun to suspect that Aunt Jane's precepts might prove, like her muff, somewhat out of date. But still this new world was a friendly world and both would do till she saw her way to new ones,

She took up a pair of scissors and began slashing at her wardrobe in a way which made Mrs. Clendenning, who came into the room a few minutes later, hold up her hands in horror.

CHAPTER IX

THE FIRST DAY'S WORK

It was snowing. Molly had never seen snow before, and her eyes kept wandering from the long letter to Jane which she was writing, to the window and the shrouded Square outside. The flakes, fine and close, were like thickening in the air; the street lamps mere bubbles of light, like so many moons in a fog. The muffled street sounds reminded her of the time Great-aunt Jane had been ill and they had spread straw on the Charleston Battery. She had drawn her desk up close to the window so she could watch the strange gray-white curtain that waved and shivered outside, and see the ghostly trees and the hunched-up figures which hurried across the Square.

The past day seemed both swift and endless as she looked back at it. She had begun it early, getting to the studio an hour before the other students, so as to explore her new surroundings, the "men's room" and the "women's room," Mr. Oliphant's own studio and all the little storerooms down the corridor with their stacks of dusty, fascinating treasures. Then Adelaide came and showed her how to set up her palette and place her easel and pose a still life, and she started to paint. She felt that it was going to be play to work with these fine immaculate brushes and the soft paint out of the smooth new tubes. But by the time Mr.

Oliphant came down-stairs in the middle of the morning she was already thoroughly discouraged.

She was sure he would send her home again after one glance at her canvas and she would have liked to turn its face to the wall so he could not see it. But he only smiled when he looked at it, twisted his mustache and blinked, and said, "Not so bad for a beginner. Keep your colors clear, my dear. Here, let's clean off your palette and begin again." With three strokes of his brush he brought order out of chaos and life out of formlessness. "See? It didn't need a great deal. When you get used to your medium you'll do finely. Now come up-stairs all of you. I've had a sitting on Mr. Fawlder's portrait, and you'll want to see what I've done."

He detained Molly after the others had gone.

"How are things going?" he asked. "Sit down and tell me what you've been doing."

"Everything is going splendidly," she answered. "Mrs. Clendenning is sweet. She's taking all the trouble in the world to make me comfortable. And Adelaide Alden has been lovely to me. She's been helping me all morning, and yesterday she took me home to tea with her. There were quite a number of people there. A brother and sister named Carmichael, who live down on Washington Square just a few doors from Mrs. Clendenning's, drove me home in their motor."

"Mary and Allen Carmichael. They're great friends of Adelaide. Charming people. I'm glad you have met them."

"They asked me to tea this afternoon."

"Go, by all means. If you make friends of them and the Aldens I shan't need to worry about you any more. Now run along down-stairs and see what you can do to that horrible looking canvas of yours. Remember to keep your paint clear and don't get discouraged. It's not a patch on what I used to do. I'll be down in the morning to look at it. And remember, Molly, if ever you want anything, your Uncle Joe's right here."

Adelaide took Molly home to lunch. Afterward she offered to send her back again but, Aunt Jane's injunction already forgotten, Molly preferred to go alone. She loitered down the Avenue, looking in the shop windows for improvements she might make in her dress for Mrs. Eustis's dinner, and seeing a great deal which she wanted to tell Janey about. She crossed the streets carefully, watching for the signals, and gave no one occasion to look at her all the way down-town.

It was just beginning to snow as she went up the steps of the Carmichael house, scattered flakes, fine and slow, which she did not recognize as snow till one lighted on her cheek and melted there.

She was all excited over it when she went into the parlor where Mary and Allen were waiting for her with a fire and tea-tray.

"It's snowing!" she announced. Her cheeks glowed from the unaccustomed cold, her lips parted over her small white teeth and her eyes shone.

Allen looked at her as one looks at something small

and charming and amusing. Mary smiled her broad, slow, friendly smile. "We're giving you rather a chilly welcome," she said.

"I've never seen snow before," said Molly. "I never really thought I would."

"Do you like us, on the whole?" asked Allen.

"Oh, I love you!" exclaimed Molly, and then flushed furiously, as they laughed at her.

When she rose to go home, Allen went with her.

"You ought not to go alone in the dark, yet a while," he told her.

The snow already covered the ground and was still falling fast. It lined the dark branches of the trees with a fine white tracery and, as Molly said, lay like an ermine mantle over the shoulders of Garibaldi.

Allen smiled. "You have quite an imagination, haven't you?"

"Not as much as you have," she retorted. "I heard you telling about South Africa yesterday."

"Do you mean you didn't believe my stories?"

"Were they meant to be believed?"

"Of course they were! They're as true as Gospel. I have photographic proof of it."

"Seeing is believing," said Molly.

"You shall see," he assured her.

"Tell me another now. A nice hot one of the desert and dryness. I'm nearly frozen and drowned."

"Not another one till you apologize."

"Dear! Dear! To think the fairy-book is closed!" She looked up at him, laughing from behind Aunt Jane's muff.

"I wish I had an extra ticket for the Troop A drill to-night. Mary and Adelaide are going with me. Have you ever seen a cavalry drill?"

"No, I never have."

"Would you like to, next time?"

"Do you wear a beautiful uniform?" she inquired. "Indeed I should love to see it." She ran laughing up the steps of Mrs. Clendenning's house. "Thanks ever so much for bringing me home. Good-night."

After dinner she went to her room to write Jane all about it.

"*Janey dear:* I'm watching a blizzard. The night is black dark with a gauzy white curtain blowing over it and falling softly, softly to the ground, like fold on fold of filmy muslin, till everything is shrouded and hidden under it. It's like nothing you have ever seen and I can't picture it to you so you can see it, even with that bright imagination of yours. It's black and it's white at once, like nothing else in the world. And it's noisy and it's deeply silent. The wind whistles in gusts through the arch at the corner and round the end of the house, but all the street sounds and the river sounds, and the hum which is all pervading, are muffled and hushed. Even here, shoulder to shoulder with—how many million people is it?—one feels lonely and shut away. What must it be far off in the country? I've been out in it, walking with a nice young man. But I couldn't really give proper attention to either young man or blizzard. Yesterday I learned what an icicle looks like, this evening I learned what it feels like. It's full of aches from its head to its feet, and it's got to melt slowly or it would die in the process. Mrs. Clendenning told me that, and cruelly chased me away from the fire when I came in. I'm thinking of

sewing all my thickest coats inside each other and making one which shall be in a measure cold proof.

"I made the loveliest mud-pie you ever saw at the studio this morning. I felt like dropping the pursuit of art on the spot and hurrying back to my happy home, but Mr. Oliphant (I'm to call him Uncle Joe hereafter, you remember Adelaide Alden does) cheered me up a bit. He says once upon a time he did as badly as that himself,—which is hard to believe.

"Adelaide Alden is a brick and a genius. She has taken this poor shivering stranger into her heart and home in a way deserving of all praise. And she can paint! I feel as though I had known her all my life already, and I like her ever so much. Mr. Oliphant, Uncle Joe, says if I make friends of her and my neighbors, the Carmichaels, the young man aforementioned and his sister Mary, there will be no further cause to worry over my social success. I wish my artistic success seemed anywhere near as assured."

CHAPTER X

MOLLY SETTLES DOWN

THE man in the next box, leaning forward to talk to the lady beside him, was looking, not at her, but over her shoulder at Molly Alloway. Molly was not aware of it but the lady was; there was a sort of angry stiffness about the back of her neck. Mary Carmichael was aware of it and amused at Molly's unconsciousness; Allen Carmichael was aware of it and amused at the lady's anger; Adelaide Alden was aware of it and vaguely uncomfortable. She felt that something ought to be done about it, and wanted to tell Molly to stop—only there didn't seem to be anything she very well could stop.

Molly was leaning forward a little to listen to Allen, while her eyes danced with delight at Caruso's singing and her mouth quivered with laughter at his clowning.

"Do you like Bori's Nedda as well as Farrar's?" whispered Allen.

"Better. They say Farrar is awfully jea ——"

But Mary said "Hush," and they had to stop talking.

Not quite a month had passed since Molly's arrival in the city, but she had made good use of her time, and already she felt herself a New Yorker. She could discuss the relative merits of the opera singers intelli-

gently; she could write Aunt Jane the latest chit-chat; and, this last accomplishment not dwelt on in letters to Aunt Jane but reserved for young Jane alone, she could swing into a dozen new dance steps with the ease of a young nymph. She could also meet herself unexpectedly in a mirror without flinching. Her wardrobe had been transformed by her quick eye and quick needle to a point where many people envied it. Little differences in it, like the little differences in her speech and manners, the way she said "toe" for "to," and "pen" for "pin," were quaint and attractive. People copied them. Her half legendary, "Acts of the Ancestors," too, and her inexhaustible fund of ghost stories, which no one could quite say whether she told in good faith or not, were good even second-hand; people repeated them. She had more invitations than she could accept, though Mr. Oliphant urged her to go about as much as she could.

"You work hard all day, forget about art in the evenings," he told her. "Go play. I don't want you to get stale."

So she went to dinners and dances, to the play and, like this evening, to the opera.

Mary leaned forward and touched Molly's shoulder as the act was drawing to a close. "Shall we go now?" she said.

After the heat of the opera house the icy air outdoors was intoxicating. Adelaide drew it in deep, snuggling her chin into her fur collar.

"What a night!" she exclaimed. "Good just to be alive. Frozen, Salamander?"

Molly denied it with chattering teeth. "No, I love it."

Adelaide laughed at her. "You surely look it. Here's my car. Good-night, everybody. Good-night, Moll." She leaned over and gave her cheek a little brushing kiss. "See you in the morning, won't I?"

She looked out of the back window and waved to them as she drove away.

Molly was in high good spirits that evening; she ran up-stairs to her room after the Carmichaels, who as usual drove her home, had said good-night, and went to her window to look out at the Square, dark and quiet in its belt of lights. She loved it. She loved all the life she was leading. She was full of sparkling happiness, quite different from the peaceful happiness of Alloway Place. She loved that, too—or at least she loved to think of it. Deep down in her heart she knew she did not really love it any more, that she could not be happy there any more—not, at least, for many years. Perhaps when she was old and tired and had lived her life. Now she wanted to live it.

In spite of the drive, the heat of the opera house was still in her lungs. She pushed up the window to breathe the fresh air. She leaned out, and looking down the block, she saw the Carmichaels' car still standing in front of their door. Allen was speaking to the chauffeur. She waved her hand to him as he turned and went up the steps. Then she drew her head in with a jerk and slammed the window shut. She knew he could not have seen her, but she seemed

to feel the admonishing presence of a very indignant old lady in the room.

"Yes, Aunt Jane," she murmured. "I'll 'fess up. It was a naughty thing to do." She caught sight of her face, flushed and ashamed-looking, in the mirror, and burst out laughing.

"Molly Alloway! You old silly! You idiot!"

She wrote a long letter to Jane that night, sitting by the window with the shade drawn up so she could look out.

"Jane dear: I'm just home from the opera. You have something to live for till you go to the opera, and then you'll know why there's everlasting music in heaven. We went in the Aldens' box—we being, of course, Adelaide and the Carmichaels and I. We're always we. There were also a Mr. Reid and a Mr. Kittery, very nice both of them, but mere padding and not in the least necessary to the real scheme of things.

"I'm taking the day backwards. In the afternoon Uncle Joe and Adelaide and I went to see an exhibition of cubist-futurist paintings. I wish you could have seen the things—and I wish you could have seen Uncle Joe. He was better than the show. He was so angry at it all that he nearly burst. Everyone else was going round sort of on tiptoe as though it was Holy Ground and whispering to each other how wonderful it was, and he led us round on a dead run, twirling his mustache as fast as his fingers would go and grumbling under his breath. When he's angry he always twirls fast and growls. When he's pleased he twirls v-e-r-y s-l-o-w-l-y, and purrs like a cat. That's the way you tell. Finally when we came to an egg-shaped thing in white marble with a point sticking out on one side for a nose, that's called the 'Head of a Woman,'

he couldn't contain himself another minute. He just let out. 'Sheep! Silly flock of sheep! Some ignoramus in the papers has told them it's good,—probably paid to do it—and here they believe it. Don't trust their own eyes! Anybody who wasn't perverted would know it was bad, utterly bad! Utterly bad, I tell you, Molly Alloway! Look at it! Look at it and see how bad it is! You'll have seen the very ultimate of badness! It can't go another step, not one more step!' All this right out loud, if you please, before a gaping audience! They'd have turned him out if he hadn't been Joseph Oliphant. But you can't very well turn him out. So they just had to gnash their teeth and bear it, poor dears. And then what do you think? There came up an old gentleman and slapped him on the shoulder and said, 'You're right, Joseph. You're dead right. It's fit for a lunatic asylum, all of it. If this is the art of the future, God help the future!' And who do you think the old gentleman was? No less a man than Alexander Stuart! Uncle Joe had been telling Adelaide and me he wanted to take us to Mr. Stuart's studio but he'd been away. So Uncle Joe introduced us and Mr. Stuart asked us to come right around then, and we went and had a wonderful afternoon. He pulled out all his things one after another, and he talked, and he drew for us. Adelaide and I were spellbound. And Uncle Joe sat and purred by the fire like a happy pussy. And then they brought in tea and Uncle Joe and Mr. Stuart started to reminisce, sort of an artistic 'Acts of the Ancestors.' Between them they've known pretty much every worthwhile artist in the last fifty years, known most of them right inside out. Isn't it a queer trait of human nature how one person's discouragement turns into another person's encouragement in a few years? I never in my life heard a more comforting statement than that Whistler had a fearful time to learn to draw.

Doesn't seem possible, does it? But it appears it's true.

"The morning spelt 'paint' as usual. Until one o'clock nothing ever happens except that, with five-minute intervals of rest, which I usually spend curled up on the divan panting like a fish. I get so excited painting that I forget to breathe. Uncle Joe says it's very bad for me.

"Well, Janey, it's high time I should go look for to-morrow if I hope to find it betimes in the morning.

"Good-night to you, dearest.

"P. S. I never saw such stars."

CHAPTER XI

"STUDIO STUDY"

MOLLY looked at her watch and her brush slipped, carrying the shadow so far forward on the forehead that it took the roundness from the head and changed the expression of the face. She gave an impatient exclamation. There were only five more minutes to work in but she must not let that hurry her and make her spoil the whole thing! Uncle Joe would be back this afternoon and what would he say to it?

"Time!"

The model stepped off the stand with a deep sigh, stretching, cat-like. The students laid their brushes and palettes down on the tall painting stools and filled the room with sudden noise and clatter. One began to sing:

"The time is long, oh Mavourneen! ——"

"I like that, Miss Dickins. The warm shadow at the back of the neck and the way the hair blends into it."

"I'm through washing my brushes. Who's next?"

"The pipe's full of paint and the water won't run out. Can't you get the plumber, Miss Alloway?"

"You know she gets him about every three days! He can't do anything. It's your own fault. Why

won't you wash the big paint off with turpentine? It's much easier anyhow."

Adelaide Alden came over to the window where Molly was still standing looking at her picture.

"Is it finished?" she asked.

"I suppose it is," answered Molly. "It's got to be. Uncle Joe'll be back this afternoon. I wonder what he'll say to it?"

"May I see it?"

Molly pushed the easel forward, making room between it and the divan.

"Oh, Molly, it's splendid! It's the best thing you've done—far and away. The best thing any of us have done. My word, Molly! It's great."

Her exclamation brought the others over to look. The model came with them, her big broken-heeled shoes shuffling under the borrowed finery of her dancing dress. She caught her breath in with a hiss.

"Gee! Do I look like that? It's true enough I feel it. It's nerves I guess. Just standin' up and tryin' not to think all the time."

"It gives you to think, all right, that figure!"

"I like the second figure better. It's just the way Miss Alden looks at the end of the morning—tired and saggy, but still full of eagerness. I've noticed lots of times, but I never had the sense to see what a wonderful picture she'd make contrasted with the saginess of the model without any eagerness."

"I like the way the background's done, the mere suggestion of the rest of us. I'm sure Mr. Oliphant will be crazy about that. It's just what he's always

drumming into us. 'Focus on one object, young ladies, and paint the rest the way you see them when you don't look at them.' Sounds simple!"

Adelaide had been staring at the picture silently, paying no attention to the talk of the other students.

"How long have you been here, Molly?" she asked. "Three months, is it? Nearly four? And you've passed us all! Do you remember the mud-pie you made the first day?"

"I should think I did! But I haven't passed you all. That's nonsense. This is the first thing I've done that's as good as you do often. I wonder what Uncle Joe will say about it. He told me not to try portraits at all while he was away. Do you suppose he'll mind?"

"Mind!" laughed Adelaide. "Are you coming out to lunch now?"

"No. I've got some sandwiches Mrs. Clendenning put up for me. I don't know what time Uncle Joe will get here and I don't want to be out when he comes. Are you coming back?"

"I don't know. I may. I'm not sure. Good-bye." What would Uncle Joe say about it?

After the others had left, Molly pushed her picture back against the wall, cleared the easels away so as to get an open space in front of it and curled up among the cushions on the divan under the big window to look at it. It certainly was the best thing she had done,—and good at that. The expressions of the two faces and figures were very striking. She had caught the dragging weariness of the model's arms, uplifted

over her head with a fan, the ugly grin into which her lips had stiffened in mimicry of sparkling smiles, and the sightless stare of her rigid eyes; and had brought out the contrast between them and the weariness of Adelaide, eager and hopeful, and radiant with the joy of successful effort.

It was good. "Nothing venture nothing have." But what would Uncle Joe say?

Anyhow she had been compelled to paint it. The two faces had been haunting her for days, the model's face dancing before her eyes in the dark, and Adelaide's filling her pleasant dreams. And Uncle Joe said if you could see a thing you could paint it. It was one of his favorite themes.

"Study faces, my dear. Wherever you are, in the street-cars, everywhere, study faces. See how the shadows deepen and blend and die, and the colors run together. It's the seeing that counts. When you can see a thing you can paint it. Don't forget that, Molly. It's all in the seeing. And you've got the eyes for it. Be sure you use them."

She was certain she had seen it in the way he meant.

The door opened on the other side of the curtain. There was Uncle Joe now!

"Hello. Anybody in?"

It wasn't Uncle Joe's voice.

"Mr. Carmichael? I'm here, Molly Alloway." She got up from the divan.

"I hoped you would be. Come out and lunch with me?"

"I've had lunch, thanks."

"So have I, as a matter of fact. Mary sent to see if you would drive out with us to the Garden Club. There's something going on there which she says is worth seeing. I don't know."

"I'm sorry. I'd love to, but I've got to stay here."

"You work too hard. Oh, I say, look at Adelaide! Did you do that? It's great."

"Yes; do you like it—really?"

"I do. I've seen her look like that a hundred times when she was painting and had forgotten every other blessed thing in the world. But I bet she doesn't like it. You've made her look as though she was—sort of fattening off that poor model."

"Oh, don't!" exclaimed Molly. "What an awful idea!"

"Well, isn't it the idea?"

"I certainly hadn't thought of it as crudely as that."

"What does Adelaide say about it?"

"Nothing about that. I don't believe she thought of it. If she did she didn't mention it. Only praised me for doing it."

The door opened again, and Adelaide came around the corner of the curtain. "Still here, Molly?" she called. "Did Allen find you? Oh, there you both are. Isn't that picture great?"

"You don't mind my having painted it, Adelaide?"

"Mind? Why, Molly, it's the most encouraging thing that's happened to me for a long time. If I really look like that when I paint there isn't the shadow of a doubt I've got it in me. The thing I mind is the way you've gone by me as though I were standing still!

It's enough to break one's heart after all the time I've been at it."

She had begun the sentence laughingly, but she ended with a quiver in her voice, turning away her head to hide her disappointment. Molly saw it.

"Why, Adelaide! That's perfect nonsense. I haven't passed you at all. I seem to have caught up on you quite a lot, but I haven't even done that really. One always goes faster at first because the beginning is the easiest part. But you're really just as far ahead as you ever were. You know this is only a fluke, you silly."

She put her arms around her and kissed her. Adelaide pushed her away a little impatiently. "You're the silly. Of course I know it's a fluke. You couldn't do it again to save your life. You'd better put on your things if you're coming with us. Mary will be here in a few minutes."

"I can't come. I told you I had to wait for Uncle Joe."

The door opened a third time.

"Is that you, Uncle Joe?"

"No, it's Brown from up-stairs. When's the Master expected, Miss Alloway? I've something to show him. By Jove! Did you do that? You must have. There's no one down here could have excepted one of you two, and it's evident Miss Alden didn't."

"Do you think I could?" asked Adelaide.

He considered before answering. "I'm not sure you could, Miss Alden. I guess Miss Alloway is the only one of the lot of us who could. Looks as though

the old Master was right when he said she had the immortal fire, doesn't it? She's burned you into immortality all right. No doubt in my mind that future generations will know your face as well as they know her name."

Adelaide turned away with a little shrug.

"I thought we were talking sense," she said.

"So I am," he answered. "Of course I don't mean I think it's the best thing she'll do, or that if it was she'd live, but she's only been painting—how long?—three, four months. Honestly, it's ridiculous to paint like that in four months!"

Adelaide and Allen sat down on the divan to wait for Mary, while Mr. Brown went on praising the picture to Molly.

"I've got a job," said Allen.

Adelaide turned her head quickly from looking at the street below, and smiled a sudden pleased smile.

"Oh, Allen, I'm so glad! Papa told me he expected to see you to-day."

"Yes, I was down at his office this morning. He's a brick. I don't expect to be of the least possible use to him. If I could go out, now, and do the actual field work that I was educated for, I do believe I might become a good engineer in time. But this office work! I guess I'll be about as useful as the cat, good to lay the blame on."

"I don't think that's the way he feels about it. He says you should know the executive end as well as the other. And you'll be able to go out in a year or two, if you wish. I think he's glad to get you, though he may

not tell you so. I know he's pleased at your trying. He said it would be hard for you to settle down after all this gadding around the world; he didn't really believe you would ever make up your mind to do it. But Mother and I both said you would."

Allen laughed. "I imagine I never would if there was a chance of gadding about any more. But, believe me, New York without an occupation! Talk of the joys of leisure! Yo—Say! Careful there!" There was a crash. "You ought to treat the old codger with more respect, Brown, old boy. How would you like to have your head knocked about like that?"

Brown was standing on a chair reaching down canvas frames from the top of a high desk for Molly. He had knocked over a skull, and the top of it had rolled away under the furniture.

"I didn't know the blamed thing was there," he exclaimed. "It was behind this false front arrangement and I didn't see it."

"It's my fault," said Molly. "I'm sorry. I hid it there to get it out of sight. I hate the thing."

"Leave it down now you've got it," said Adelaide. "I'll paint it to-morrow."

Brown fished up the bottom of the skull from where it had wedged between the wall and the desk. "Sorry, old fellow. No disrespect meant. Where did your lid go?"

A fourth time the door opened.

"Molly! Allen! Ready?" Mary came to the end of the curtain. "Hello! A regular party. Are you all coming? There's lots of room."

"I can't, Mary; I'd love to," said Molly, "but Uncle Joe will be here any minute and I ought to be here when he arrives."

"I'm sorry. I wish you could. Mr. Brown?"

"In the car? I'd like to. It's a bully day."

"I think I won't go," said Allen. "I think it's a cold day. Besides I'm a business man now—or I shall be Monday morning, and I've got some things to attend to. Can't waste an afternoon like that."

"Very well," agreed Mary with sisterly frankness. "The car's much pleasanter when it isn't so crowded. Ready, Adelaide? Let's go, if you are."

CHAPTER XII

ALLEN

MOLLY ALLOWAY was sitting on the edge of the divan with a canvas frame resting against her knee. She was pulling the canvas taut over it with a stretching-iron and holding it in place while Allen Carmichael, kneeling in front of her, tacked it down.

The light was beginning to fade from the room, but the red reflection of the sunset, thrown back from the white building across the street, filled it with color. The brightness caught the little tendrils of hair which curled softly at Molly's temples, like the downy breast feathers of a bird ruffled where the wings touch them. It made their warm brown shine metallic red.

Allen looked up at her. "You should see the effect of this light on your hair," he said. "It makes it glow like a copper halo round your face."

Molly raised her head from the canvas and looked about the room. "Isn't it queer? I love light effects, but they're perfectly despairing to paint."

She turned toward the window and the color falling on her cheek made it glow rosy brown as it had when she first came to town.

"It tells tales," said Allen. "You do work too hard."

Molly laughed at him. "Much you know about work! By the way, did I hear you telling Adelaide you were actually going to work?"

"I am, yes."

"I thought you weren't strong enough."

"I guess I'm strong enough to do anything I want."

The opening was irresistible. "Granted," she laughed. "But still, I thought—take care, that tack isn't in the right place."

"You want to pull the corner tighter, Miss Alloway. It's going to wrinkle otherwise." The tap, tap, tap of his hammer made a sort of running accompaniment to their conversation. "Still you thought, did you? That was pretty cheeky of you, I think. I suppose the time may come when a man wants to settle down."

"You mean you really want to work?" asked Molly.

"I really do."

"For a week," she mocked him. "What are you going to do?"

"Civil engineering. It's the only thing I know anything about. I chose it, when I was made to choose something, because I thought it would carry me out into the wilds and give me adventures. And now here I am taking the office end of it, verifying other fellows' plans instead of going out and having the fun of making them myself. I'm going into Mr. Alden's office."

"Oh, are you? You know my brother William is planning to go into his office, too. Mr. Alden has offered him a position if Grandfather doesn't mind, and I don't believe he will."

"Why should he mind?"

"Because none of the family have ever before gone into anything but one of the professions."

"Isn't engineering a profession?"

"Not in Grandfather's sense. It's business. But then, Mr. Alden is in it, and Grandfather knew him when he was a boy, and his father knew his, and so on ad infinitum, so he makes a respectable precedent."

"It's funny, isn't it, how differently people feel about things? My father wanted me to do it. He had it all planned from the time I was a kid for me to go in Mr. Alden's office, just as I'm going now, but I always shied off from it before."

Molly was a born tease. "And now you actually think you want to do it?"

Allen threw down his hammer. "That's the last frame, isn't it? Why in heaven's name do you suppose I'm doing it if I don't want to? A man can't keep his self-respect, much less win anybody else's, unless he does something, these days. You wouldn't be laughing at me if I was doing anything worth while, now would you? Because I haven't, you think I can't. I've only come to realize it lately. I ought to have much sooner, I suppose—but that's ancestors, too."

Molly dropped her laughter.

"I'm sorry I said that. It was horrid of me. Of course I don't think you can't just because you haven't. Don't I know about ancestors? When they say a thing it's almost impossible to do anything different. It wouldn't matter so much if they weren't so old-fashioned. But I suppose it's too much to expect of ancestors that they should keep up to date." Laughter flashed up for a second and then died down again. "I wonder whether—afterward—if we have done some-

thing we oughtn't, or more likely we haven't done something we ought,—they very seldom urge us to sins of commission, I must say that much for them—'They told me to,' will be considered a good excuse. I have an idea we shall be judged by our own consciences rather than theirs. I believe in the long run it would be better to have done wrong, doing what you thought was right, than it would be to do right thinking you were doing wrong."

Allen had risen from the floor and was sitting on the divan beside her. "You know my mother was an English woman," he said. "She thought no gentleman ought to work. She used to tell me as a thing to be proud of that not one of her ancestors had ever earned a dollar. She used to say there ought to be some gentlemen in America and she wanted me to be one of them. Father was a silk merchant, and his father, and his father, till you got to a carpenter way back, and he didn't feel that way about it. So they sent me to Boston Tech to learn to be an engineer. It was a sort of compromise between them. When I felt lazy I thought Mother was right, and when I felt energetic I thought Father was right. Father had arranged with Mr. Alden that I was to go into his office when I was through, but in my own mind I never quite decided whether I wanted to or not. But I'd have had to anyhow, only Father died just when I finished my course, and Mother packed me off to Africa. I was delighted to go—naturally. And I stayed on and on. I think I was afraid to come home, because I still hadn't made up my mind what I was going to do when

I got here. And then Mother died last winter, and I should have come right back to Mary then. But I didn't. I waited till I got sick. And now here I am doing just what Father wanted me to do and wishing I'd done it from the beginning." He laughed. "What got me started? I apologize, Miss Alloway."

"You needn't. Sometimes one wants to talk—and one wants to hear."

Allen felt a little ashamed of himself for his outburst.

"It's the fault of you girls," he said. "You're at the bottom of it all. May I smoke?"

"Surely."

He lounged back across the deep divan, puffing his cigarette. "You work too hard. You make a fellow feel lazy. Mary's the only restful one among you. Why can't you stay at home where you belong?"

"So there may be some ladies in America?" she laughed. "They'll be as obsolete as gentlemen soon. Spirit of Aunt Jane! I hope there's no such thing as telepathy." She jumped up. "We ought to find the top of that skull, you know. Mary carried Mr. Brown off in such a hurry he forgot all about it. It rolled under that big chest of drawers, didn't it? I do hope it isn't broken. Maybe I can fish it out with this maul stick."

She prodded the darkness and brought out the round piece of bone in the midst of a nest of dust.

"You pick it up," she said. "I do hate it."

Allen fitted it in place. "You shouldn't hate it, Molly Alloway," he said, laying his hand on the head.

"You've got one yourself just like it under your hair. He was all right in his day, you know. He was a man like any other. He lived just like you and me, and he hoped like you and me, and he loved like ——"

Finished, the sentence would have passed with the others, unnoticed. Cut short, it echoed in the room, filling the silence.

Molly cut the pause short.

"He came from Sing Sing," she said. "Uncle Joe paid a thousand dollars for him. He was a murderer and he killed his wife. That's the way he loved! I hate him! At home if he was buried in the graveyard the niggers wouldn't go near it!"

The sunset had died. The room was gray-dark and gloomy. Molly reached for the switch and flooded it with light. In the first flare of it her eyes looked big and black. She shaded them with her hands.

It was Allen's turn to tease. "Would you go near it?"

She gave a little shrug. "I can't say. We haven't any such. Not that I like graveyards. Listen. There's Uncle Joe's step up-stairs. I'm going to show him my picture."

"May I come too?"

"I'd rather you wouldn't. I'm a little scared, you know."

"Then I'll wait till you come back and we can walk down-town together."

"What about your errands?"

"It's too late for them anyhow. Good luck."

CHAPTER XIII

WHAT'S THE MATTER WITH ADELAIDE?

"HELLO, Dad! So it's all settled, is it?" Adelaide greeted her father as he came in the front door.

"How did you hear so soon?" asked Mr. Alden, taking off his coat. "I only saw Allen at lunch time. Have you seen him?"

"Yes, he came to the studio."

"He did, did he?"

"Oh, not to bring me the news. He and Mary and I were going out together, and Mary sent him to ask Molly Alloway to go with us. He just told me *en passant*."

"Have a nice drive? How's my friend Molly? Why didn't you bring her home to tea?"

"Because she didn't go with us after all. She had to stay home to see Uncle Joe, who's just back from his lecture tour,—at least he was to get back this afternoon. And Allen couldn't go with us either on account of the 'job.' He had some things to finish up so he could start in Monday morning with a clear slate."

Mr. Alden grunted. "I should say his slate ought to be pretty clear already. He's had time enough to clear it."

"But one doesn't clear one's slate when one has time enough, you know, Daddy. Time enough is such an

awful lot too much. One has to string things out to fill it. Imagine what it would be to wake up some morning and find one's slate perfectly clear and nothing in the world to mark it up again."

Her father shrugged his shoulders. "Allen has never shown a marked aversion to clear slates up to now, though he may have been somewhat averse to the clearing process. Going to give me some tea, Daughter? Where's Mamma?"

"Mamma's out. Tea'll be here in a minute."

"How any woman could be such a fool! She just about ruined him! Do you suppose he's got it in him to pull himself together?"

"Allen's mother?" Adelaide expressed no opinion.

"He's got his chance now if he wants to take it. The only one he'll ever get from me! It's pretty well decided that William Alloway is to come up in the spring. I'm taking him on account of his sister — If he's half as clever!"

"Molly's done a wonderful picture while Uncle Joe has been away. It really is remarkable. I'm not exaggerating. Of course, I suppose she is a genius, but even so I don't honestly see how she has learned enough in such a short time to do such wonderful things."

"Yes? What sort of a picture? What's the subject?"

"The class at work in the studio. It doesn't sound very exciting, but Molly has treated it in quite a new way. At least I don't know any other picture like it. Usually those studio scenes aren't much more than still

life studies. All the little figures standing around might just as well be inanimate objects for all the individuality or character they have. Molly has concentrated on two figures and left the others vaguely in the background. One figure is I, because I happened to be nearest to her, and the other is the model. She has thrown her whole soul into it. I wish you could see the eagerness and—and—the sort of light she has put on my face. Of course she got it from her own. Her face does seem to burn like that when she paints. Mine doesn't, worse luck. I wish it did."

"I'm not sure it doesn't, Adelaide. You get very intent when you paint, you know. I should like to see the picture."

"Oh, I guess you'll see it, all right. It's sure to be exhibited. I'm really not exaggerating when I say it's splendid. It isn't exactly intentness she's got, either. It's more than that. And the contrast between my face and the model's is really awful. Hers is so dull and utterly hopeless. It makes me look like a sort of slave driver. Of course they are pathetic, those models. We only get the ones at the schools who aren't much good,—the ones the big artists don't want. Posing can't be an inspiring business at best, and I suppose if you're a failure at that you're a pretty complete failure. Still, either Molly has much more insight than I have or she has drawn heavily on her imagination. I couldn't paint if I had to look at a face on which I saw that expression."

"She probably has drawn on her imagination. One must, I should think, in painting just as one does in

music or writing. A picture is a work of fiction, isn't it, Daughter?"

Adelaide objected. "Why no, Daddy. It's history. Unless it's all made up out of your head."

"I don't think so. Photography's history. Rather dull and prosaic, even if you do try to lighten it up a bit. Painting's fiction. And so you're going to realize your ambition at last and see yourself hung on the walls of an exhibition."

"Who, I?" Adelaide looked up at him, not at first seeing the joke. "Oh, yes, I guess I am."

She got up and poked the fire.

"Let it alone, Daughter. It's burning beautifully. You'll just spoil it."

Adelaide came back to her chair. She picked up a book and bent her head over it. Then she laid it down suddenly.

"Oh Daddy! How could you make fun of me like that, Daddy? When you knew how much I cared!"

"Make fu——" He looked at her in silence for a minute. "I'm very sorry, Daughter. I didn't mean it that way. If I had, you know I would never have said it. I'm just as sure as I'm sitting here that you will see yourself in the exhibition, right on the line—very soon,—very soon. I'm only surprised that you haven't before. I can't understand why they didn't take that child's head of yours. It's much better than a great many of the things they did take."

"No, it isn't. It isn't any good at all, not when you compare it with things that really are good. None of

my things are. They look good alongside of the things those other people at the studio do, but they none of them really have one single spark of talent—as soon as anyone comes who has the least bit of talent she goes right by me. Just think, Dad, what she has done in three months! And here I've been drudging for years and years and years. I don't know how many. It's awfully discouraging. I——” All of a sudden tears came. She put her head down on the arm of the sofa and sobbed. Her father looked at her, twisting his foot round and round at the ankle nervously, and biting his finger.

“You oughtn't to be discouraged, Daughter. You're going along all right. You mustn't mind if Molly does go more quickly. Some people shoot right up as high as they are going in no time. But the race isn't always to the swift. There is absolutely no doubt in my mind that you will succeed if you keep on as you are going. And besides, Molly's picture is probably not nearly as good as you think it is.”

“Yes, it is too,” she exclaimed. She was struggling hard to suppress her tears. “It's awfully hard to go on when you are discouraged. And I am, whatever you say. I'm so disappointed. You don't know how much I minded about that child's head. And then to have you make fun of me! Oh! There's the door-bell!” She got up and ran out of the room.

Her father called after her. “Don't run away, Adelaide, it's probably only Mamma.” But she did not listen to him.

Mrs. Alden came into the room. “What's the mat-

ter with Adelaide?" she asked. "What did she run up-stairs like that for?"

"She's discouraged about her work. I think she must be over-tired."

"Of course she is. It's absurd the way she goes on. What does she do it for? Why should she? I wish you'd stop encouraging her. What discouraged her?"

"She thinks Molly Alloway is doing better than she is. Molly has painted a picture which Adelaide thinks is splendid. I suppose it isn't really half as good as she thinks."

"I hope it is. Molly deserves success, the plucky way she works. I don't see how Adelaide can think of begrudging it to her. It's ridiculous of her! They're in entirely different positions. Molly's whole life depends on it. And if she should make the very greatest success, it wouldn't give her one-half the things which Adelaide seems so anxious to throw away for this absurd painting."

Mr. Alden raised his eyebrows slightly. "It's the new generation, my dear. We must reckon on that. You'd better have fresh tea. That's been standing. I'll ring."

He came back to his chair by the fire.

"Well, I've settled with Allen Carmichael. He comes on Monday."

Mrs. Alden looked up quickly. "Really! Did he seem pleased, or was he still hesitating?"

"Eager."

"I wonder — What did Adelaide say when you told her?"

"Nothing. He'd told her already."

"Oh! The two things must go together in their minds, I should think."

"Not necessarily."

"I can't imagine his wanting to come to your office unless ——"

"I can, my dear, as far as that goes. It would be the natural thing for him to do to come to me for a place if he wanted one, in any event. How does Adelaide feel about it?"

"You would be more likely to know than I would."

"Not about that."

"She felt very strongly then. But lately I can't tell."

"I was almost afraid, for a little while, that it had cost us her confidence."

"I'm not sure it didn't—at least in part. It was about that time that she took up this painting craze, and since then I know I have felt out of touch. Whatever the reason is."

"We did the right thing. Don't let it worry you, my dear."

"I do worry. She hasn't an idea outside her painting. I believe the best thing that could happen to her would be to have Molly Alloway pass her and leave her so far behind that she never wanted to touch another brush in her life. Then she might be content to lead the life of other girls in her position. She's simply throwing away her chances one after another."

"It's the new generation, my dear," Mr. Alden reminded her again. "And, after all, the life you speak

of must become rather dull after a while, I should think. If we had killed this other affair I should be only too thankful that she had her painting."

"Killed it? It never was in the least our idea to kill it."

"Yet we insisted it should be dead."

"What we meant was that it should sleep."

"Well, all I say is that if it should be dead, I would be thankful for her painting."

"But it can't be, now he's carrying out your one condition."

Mr. Alden looked at her for a minute with a suggestion of impatience. "Circles!" he said. "It's time to dress for dinner."

CHAPTER XIV

AT THE MUSEUM

THE afternoon had the feel of spring. Over the shrubbery in the Park not even the faintest veil of green yet shimmered, but in the thickets of the Ramble Molly and Adelaide heard the call of a robin, and in the open spaces by the Mall they saw a flight of black-birds. The air had lost its winter sparkle. It was soft and languorous like Molly's South. It made her think of the plantation, the work of it, which Jane was doing in her stead, and the beauty of it, the misty dreamy flatness, the brightness of the almond trees against the sombre cypress, the fragrance of jasmine flowers; of the lazy, irresponsible darkies, and the piccaninnies playing in the dust; of the dogs and the horses and the stubborn, blowing cattle. Here in the Park it was pleasant enough, but the streets were at their worst. There had been a fog in the morning and down among the tall buildings the dampness still hung, a slippery slime on the pavements, and a choking, bad smelling thickness in the atmosphere. Molly sighed.

Adelaide looked at her, tipping her head with a quizzical smile. "Penny, Miss Melancholy?"

Molly laughed at herself. "I'm homesick for the alligators, I guess. They're just beginning to wake up in the Cooper River."

"You ought to hurry home!"

"I feel like it."

"But are there really alligators?"

"Of course there are. Lots of them. You see them all the time in summer, in the river, with their heads just out, and basking along the bank in the sun. In winter they dig themselves into the mud and go to sleep with a chunk of light-wood in their tummies so they shan't get an empty feeling."

"Honestly?"

"I suppose I'll be going back soon now. Oh dear!"

"Crazy! You were sighing for it a minute ago."

"Of course I was. Just imagine going out with Bob at sunrise, rounding up the cattle for a dip in the pen, galloping over the flat fields. Look at that girl trotting along there in her best bib and tucker. Doesn't it look stupid? Oh dear! Oh dear!"

"One for each," teased Adelaide.

"That's it exactly. The winter has gone very fast."

"You must be very pleased with the way it's gone."

"I don't know."

"You don't know!"

"Oh, I've enjoyed it. I've had a wonderful time. But I'm not sure whether I've made the best of all the opportunities Uncle Joe has given me. You know, Adelaide, the parable of the talents? I hate that parable. It wakes me up in the middle of the night wondering whether I'm a profitable servant."

"You are so funny! If you hadn't done well I might understand. But what more do you want anyway? Everybody says you have real genius."

"But that only makes it worse! It strips every possible cloak of excuse right off your shoulders. If you fail it isn't anybody's fault but just your own."

Adelaide gave an impatient exclamation. "You make me tired, Molly Alloway! How can you talk like that?" Her voice sounded really irritated.

Molly looked at her, lifting her eyebrows a little and they walked on without speaking.

"I hate these excursions," said Molly, as they came in sight of the Museum.

"Do you? Why? I like them."

"Yes, but you haven't anything to do with them. You don't have to herd the people along, and not let the outsiders crowd the students out so completely that they can't hear a single word Uncle Joe says to them, let alone seeing the picture he's talking about."

"Of course the crowd is horrid. But it's awfully interesting just the same."

"But I don't hear any of it! I love to come here, just you and Uncle Joe and I together. But these 'personally conducted tours' are awful."

Mr. Oliphant's walking lectures were famous things in the New York art world. Although they were intended merely for his own students, and came at no stated intervals, crowds always gathered to hear them. Teachers and students and full-blown artists were all on the alert to learn when and where they were to be, and the more impecunious of Mr. Oliphant's pupils found it a lucrative business to keep them informed. Often they had only a few hours' notice, as it was usually chance that decided when and where the lec-

tures should take place. But no matter how short the time a crowd always gathered.

When Molly and Adelaide came into the main entrance hall of the Museum they found fifty people assembled there, waiting.

Mr. Oliphant had already arrived. He was walking up and down behind the columns at the back of the hall, nervously twisting his mustache. Now and then he looked out at his gathering audience and cleared his throat. He was really pleased at its size, but it frightened him. Fifty years of success had not jaded his taste for it. He still sought praise as naively as a child, and, like a child, still feared he might not win it. It gave him a simplicity which linked him very close to his students, and made them love him. He liked them to call him "Master," but they thought of him more as a comrade. Before every lecture his shyness nearly overcame him. Every few minutes he looked at his watch. He grunted as Molly and Adelaide came up to him.

"I was afraid you were going to be late."

"Oh, no indeed! Hello!"

Allen Carmichael detached himself from the crowd outside and joined their group. Molly was surprised to see him.

"So you decided to come?" said Adelaide.

"How did you know about it?" asked Molly.

"Adelaide told me."

Mr. Oliphant had begun to walk again, up and down, up and down, with quick nervous steps. The others fell in behind him, following mechanically like

the tail of an erratic kite. Allen stopped before Borglum's "Mares of Diomedes" at the foot of the main staircase.

"That's a wonderful thing," he said.

Mr. Oliphant came to a stand, as though glad of something to distract his mind. "A marvelous piece of work. So——" he modeled the air with his supple fingers as though he felt the soft wax between them. "So—so—— A marvelous piece of work," he ended with a shrug.

Adelaide laid her hand on the flank of one of the plunging horses. "Very few of us humdrum mortals ever see such wild, fierce abandon of motion as that," she said, "but when we look at this we know it's what it must be like."

"It is," said Allen. "I've seen just such stampedes a hundred times among the wild animals in South Africa."

Mr. Oliphant pulled out his watch. "It's time, Molly. Tell them, please. We're five minutes late in starting."

He hurried up the stairs as though trying to catch the escaped minutes. Half-way up he stopped beside the little alabaster head of Tiy.

"Here you have the very antithesis of that fierce action below. The personification of stillness. It took an artist to place her here, looking down at the wild mares. By the way, the latest idea is that it probably isn't Tiy at all but her son."

He looked back down the stairs at the crowd surging after him and hurried away, very much as though

he were trying to escape them. Adelaide and Allen let them flow past them.

"I don't believe that," said Allen. "It's a woman's face. Can you imagine that smile on a man?"

"No," answered Adelaide. "Of course you're a queen, you lovely exasperating creature! I couldn't look at her long, though. That baffling, condescending smile would drive me wild. I'd break it so as not to see it."

Allen looked rather bored. "It's the characteristic of Egyptian art, isn't it? Riddle of the Sphinx, and all that sort of thing. I never did take much stock in it, myself."

Adelaide laughed. "Did you ever take much stock in any art?" she asked.

"Not much. I say, what a mob! This is really awful, you know. Let's rescue Miss Alloway, and go look at armor and things."

"Molly can't leave. It's her job to go along."

"Does she do any talking?"

"Oh, no. She just tries to keep a space clear around Uncle Joe so he won't be quite smothered. This is the way we go to the armor. There it is."

"Look here! Here's a Zulu Assegai. The kind of thing that killed the Prince Imperial, you know. It's a mighty formidable weapon in the hands of a man who knows how to use it."

"Do you know how?"

"Pretty well. It's the best thing you can have against a lion, next to a gun, of course."

"This is your last free afternoon, isn't it?"

"Except Saturday and Sunday."

"Are you glad or sorry?"

"Both. I expect I'll hate it, but I want very much to do it."

"I know the feeling. I think Mary's disgusted."

"Do you?"

It was nearly an hour before they rejoined Mr. Oliphant's party.

CHAPTER XV

MOLLY INVENTS A GAME

WITH late comers arriving and casual visitors attaching themselves, the crowd around Mr. Oliphant was growing larger and larger. Already not a quarter of the people were able to get within seeing distance. The rest had to content themselves with wandering aimlessly about the far end of the gallery; yet, sheep-like, they continued to follow.

They had pressed Molly away from Mr. Oliphant and she could not get near him again. She tried once or twice and then gave it up. It would be better to head him off as he went through the doorway into the next room. If she went quickly there ought to be time.

But for Molly to hurry through rooms full of pictures was quite beyond her powers. She walked more and more slowly and finally, before Thayer's "Monadnock" in the sunset, came to a standstill. She had never seen a mountain in her life and this pictured peak, rising clear and bright above the shadowed valley, filled her with awe and wonder. She never could pass it without pausing to look and look. It suggested a grandeur and beauty beyond her experience, and spurred her imagination to almost painful efforts. Almost unconsciously she sat down on a bench opposite

it, and half an hour later, Allen Carmichael, making good his escape from the crowd and seeking the quickest way out of the building, found her there, staring fixedly up at it.

She looked down when he spoke to her, her eyes still far away as though they were seeing long distances. "I wonder why they sky it," she said. "I love it. Tell me, is that what they really look like? I've never really seen a mountain."

Allen glanced up at it. "I should say it was pretty good. Not that I'm any judge. That crowd is dreadful! You can hardly breathe in there."

Molly came to earth again. "Oh! I must go back. I shouldn't have stayed so long."

Allen detained her as she was darting away. "Don't go back," he said. "You're looking tired, all tuckered out. And you can't be of the slightest use, you know. It would take a dozen of you to handle that mob. Come out in the Park and get some fresh air."

Something of the spaciousness and freedom of the wild landscape had passed into Molly's mood. The enclosing walls had become distasteful to her, the thought of the hot, breathing crowd repugnant.

"All right," she said, "I'd like to get out of doors. There's still half an hour before Uncle Joe will be ready to go home."

The haze was lifting and the big clear driveway outside the Museum was flooded with sunlight. Children were playing on the long steps, running to and fro and up and down.

"Doesn't it look nice?" said Molly, as she came through the door.

They crossed over to the Obelisk and took a path in by the Little Reservoir.

"So you've never seen a mountain?" said Allen. "That seems so strange to me. I was brought up among them in Vermont, in summer. I can't imagine what it would be like not to have seen one any more than what it would be like never to have seen—a horse or something like that. They're one of the common-places to me."

"I don't believe you can imagine what it would be like not to have seen half the things I haven't seen. Just this and home is all I know. But I don't think I should want mountains ever to become common-places. I should like them always to give me the thrill that picture does."

"But I don't mean anything disparaging by commonplaces. Sunlight is a commonplace, isn't it? Yet you exclaimed about it when you came out of that beastly Museum. Commonplace things are the ones which do give you thrills. I bet you get the thrill of your life when you first see your flat fields again."

Molly admitted it. "I bet I do," she said. "I feel it coming already. But that's a different kind of thrill. I'm glad there are such a lot of things I haven't seen. It's such fun seeing them now for the first time."

They were walking quickly. It was getting cooler as the afternoon wore on, and the change from the closeness of the Museum to the fresh air brought the

color to Molly's cheeks. Her eyes sparkled. The wind had blown a wisp of hair out from under her hat brim and it curled over her ear, rising and falling with her steps. Allen smiled as he looked at her.

"Do you know what's lots of fun?" she went on. "You imagine just what something you have never seen must look like, and then you paint a picture of it, and then when you see the original you compare them. But you've got to paint your imagination before you see the reality because the imagination vanishes completely as soon as you see the reality, and you can't even remember what it was like."

"Can't you?"

"Haven't you ever tried it? You think—'that isn't in the least what I expected it to look like'—but you can't for the life of you remember what you did expect."

Allen gave an amused chuckle. "Have you ever painted a mountain?" he asked.

Molly shook her head. "No, I don't believe I could. I'd always think of that mountain there, and just make a bad copy of Thayer's picture."

"But make another kind of mountain," suggested Allen. "They're not all like that, you know, bald red rock, rising above dark spruces. There are lots of different kinds of mountains. Some go up gradually—gradually, and their outline against the sky is just a gentle slope; and some go up sheer and straight, great rocky walls cutting their way through the air; some have trees on their summits, and some have snow, and some, like that one, have rock. And some-

times they huddle together, and sometimes they stand proudly alone, and sometimes you see them over stormy seas and sometimes you see them over peaceful lakes, with their reflections lying on the water. And there's sunlight and moon and starlight,—and there are shadows. There are plenty of different kinds of mountains to imagine, Molly Alloway. Paint one and let me see it."

"All right," agreed Molly, "I will. I tell you, I'll paint your place up in Vermont if you'll paint my home down in South Carolina."

"But I can't paint," objected Allen.

"Then you can ——" Molly interrupted herself with a laugh. "I was going to say you could take a photograph! I'll tell you what you can do. You can write it. Describe just what you think it looks like. We'll have to turn around and go back now."

"That's a go, then," said Allen. "But you'll have to ask me down there to see how near I come to it. And you'll have to come up to Vermont to see yours."

"Oh, I'm coming," said Molly. "Mary's already asked me. You will have to come and see Alloway sometime when I am there at a pleasant season of the year. There's no use in coming in summer. You'd hate it."

"Are you going back this summer?"

"I expect to."

"By the way, you never told me what Mr. Oliphant said about your picture."

Molly flushed with pleasure. "Oh, he likes it. He likes it even better than I hoped he would. You know

we ought to hurry. We've been gone nearly half an hour already."

Mr. Oliphant's audience was straggling from the building when they got back to the Museum. Mr. Oliphant and Adelaide Alden came out together behind the others.

Mr. Oliphant's eyes looked screwed up behind his glasses as though they hurt him. "Where have you been?" he demanded. "I thought you had deserted me, Molly Alloway."

"They were too much for me, Uncle Joe. I couldn't do anything with them—and it was so stuffy. Is it all right?"

"Perfectly all right." He let his glasses tinkle to the end of their ribbon. "Let's go home now as quickly as possible. Are you all coming down to the studio?"

"We can't," said Adelaide. "We're going to our house. Mary is to meet us there. I was in hopes you would come too. Can't you?"

"You'd better," urged Allen. "It's a sort of killing of the fatted calf in honor of my return to usefulness."

"Impossible! Impossible!" Mr. Oliphant rubbed the tips of his thumbs and forefingers together, nervously. "I must get back to the studio. Molly can answer for herself. Make up your mind quickly, Molly. Here comes our bus."

Molly followed him as he hurried down the steps. Adelaide stood still, watching to see whether they would catch it.

"There! now let's go," she said, waving to Molly, "That's awfully tiring."

"I shouldn't think it was worth while," said Allen.

She shrugged her shoulders. "It's part of the pursuit of art. I'm not sure it is worth while. I think I will give it up."

"You give it up, Adelaide! Not you! You couldn't, not after all these years."

"Couldn't I! It's all very well to say the race isn't to the swift. That's just exactly what it is. And I'm tired of being a turtle. Look at the way Molly Alloway has passed me!"

"Is that what's the matter!" exclaimed Allen. "You're just plain jealous, Adelaide Alden! You oughtn't to let yourself be. It's ridiculous; you're up against a genius, you know. And then ——"

"Oh, drop it! There's no use talking about it. I'm tired of hearing about geniuses. And I've told you I'm tired anyhow."

It is so easy to quarrel with someone we've played with ever since we were children. We have done it so many times before.

CHAPTER XVI

WHO HAS CHANGED?

ADELAIDE wished she had not quarreled with Allen. She had not been able to shake off the ill-humor since then. It was all because she was tired, of course, as she had said to Allen. When one is tired ill-humor lurks so close to the surface that it takes only a pin-prick to let it out. But how can you dam it up again?

She was combing her hair in front of the mirror in her mother's room. It curled and floated around her face, taking the years off her head. With her half-angry eyes shining through it, she looked like a wild-willed child.

The Carmichaels had decided to stay to dinner, and afterward they were all going to the motor show. Allen had promised his sister a car and Mary wanted to see the different makes. Adelaide was not sure she really wanted to go with them. But she was in the mood to do the particular thing she wanted to do least.

Mary was combing her hair too. Straight and heavy it hung down beside her cheeks like a nun's veil, making her face look pale and esthetic. Adelaide took up a little pendant which was lying on the bureau and hung it in the centre of Mary's forehead.

"You'd make a lovely mediæval princess," she said. "Will you let me paint you that way?"

She did not want to be cross, and she did want to turn the conversation away from Allen's entry into her father's office, which her mother and Mary persisted in talking about.

Mary smiled at her. "How many times have you already painted me?" she asked.

"Not once since it could be called painting."

Her mother's attention was not to be turned.

"I think it's quite amusing to see how after four years of revolt he has come back to his parents' plan," she said.

"I don't see how you can call it revolt," objected Adelaide. "And I don't see how you can call it his parents' plan. It wasn't his mother's plan at all."

"That was a mistake."

"I don't see how you can say that, either."

Her mother opened her mouth with a little irritated "Tut. You'd better take some soda, Adelaide. You have a headache."

"I haven't a headache. I don't want soda."

"Allen has evidently come to think it was a mistake."

"I don't see that at all. It suits him now to go to work, but I don't see how that proves that he thinks he ought to have done it four years ago."

"It would have been better if he had."

"You don't know that. I don't see how people can go back and say such and such a thing would have been better. It might have changed him entirely."

"That's not likely when four years in Africa haven't."

"But don't you think they have?" Adelaide appealed to Mary.

"No, not much. He hardly seems older even, to me."

"How funny. I suppose I've changed then. The effect would be the same."

"How do you mean—the effect?"

"Why, we wouldn't react on each other in the same way."

"I'm ready," said Mary. "I guess I'll go downstairs."

Mrs. Alden detained Adelaide. "You have changed, my dear. You have grown so bitter. I should hardly know my little girl."

Adelaide shrugged her shoulders. "I can't help it. I have only developed as circumstances have made me."

"I don't know what you mean by that, Adelaide. But I know the noble thing is not to let circumstances make you, but for you to make circumstances."

"That's not possible," said Adelaide. "I haven't had the making of them. It's you——" She stopped abruptly.

Her mother flushed a little. "You mean we have made you bitter?"

Adelaide took a long breath. "Oh, I don't know what I mean. It's you who said I was bitter. I never did. I wish you'd stop!"

But her mother did not mean to stop. "I think you had really better take some soda, Adelaide. It will make you feel better."

"I won't," said Adelaide. "I don't need to feel better. I'm all right."

"So you and Allen don't react on each other as you used to?"

"Oh dear! Did I say that? Well, it probably isn't his fault. You say yourself I've changed."

"I don't think it is his fault. He seems to like to be here as much as ever."

"If I wasn't so intimate with Mary he wouldn't have to be. And there isn't the shadow of a reason why he should be if he doesn't want to."

Her mother was bound to get to the bottom of the matter. "Don't you want him to be?" she asked.

Adelaide refused to answer the question.

"I'm going down-stairs," she said.

Her mother called after her that she had better take some soda.

Mary was at the piano playing. Allen was looking over her shoulder and singing a little, very badly. He joined Adelaide by the fire when she came into the room.

"Mary tells me you think I've changed," he said. "How?"

Adelaide gave a quick glance in Mary's direction. "You'd better not tease me this evening. I've told you I'm cross. I didn't say you'd changed. I said either you or I had. Don't you agree with me?"

Allen considered a minute. "Perhaps."

"And you don't think you have? So you all agree it's I! I'm the goat."

"Adelaide! I didn't say that!"

"But you meant it."

"I don't know just what I do mean. I think probably we both have changed."

"The times have changed." Mr. Alden coming into the room saw the need of a diversion though he did not know what they were talking about. "Why didn't you bring my little Molly home with you?"

"You always ask that."

"Because I always want to know."

"She can't always come. She couldn't this evening. I asked her."

"She tells me Mr. Oliphant says her picture is a masterpiece," said Allen.

"I told you that myself," said Adelaide. She felt as though they had all combined to badger her. Mary put the final straw on her back.

"You must be glad to have a part in it," she said.

Adelaide jumped up from her chair. "Dinner's late," she exclaimed. "I don't know why they never can be prompt when you specially want them to be." She went out of the room and did not appear again till dinner was announced.

She hurried the meal. The show would be so crowded there would be no fun in going unless they went early, she said. But when they were through she refused to go at all. She went up-stairs with Mary to get her wraps and did not come down again.

"Say good-night to Allen for me," she said. "I'm going right up to bed. You can tell Mamma that headache she wished on me has appeared. I hope the show'll be nice. Good-night."

Allen was rather relieved. "What's the matter with Adelaide?" he asked Mary.

She answered with another question. "That old business—how does it stand?"

"It doesn't stand at all. They wouldn't have it. You know that."

"Yes, but I always supposed it did—sub rosa."

"No."

"Haven't you spoken about it?"

"No, of course we haven't. Why should we?" He repeated the question more slowly as though he wanted an answer. "Why should we?"

"I don't know that you should. I was just wondering."

"You don't mean to say that's what's the matter!"

"I don't know that I mean anything particular."

"It was definitely understood that we were not to speak of it again—unless we wanted to."

"But it's hard to tell what a girl wants unless you do speak, isn't it? It seems like rather a one-sided arrangement."

"On the other hand, if you do speak it doesn't matter any more what the man wants. And that seems like rather a one-sided arrangement, too."

"It's unfortunate you couldn't have gone into some other office."

"Why?"

"Well, everybody knew about it, and now it seems as though you were just carrying out the old plan."

"As it happens I couldn't have gone into any other office. Everybody, as you say, knew I was booked for

Mr. Alden's and there was a vacancy, and if I hadn't taken it they'd have thought he didn't consider me fit for it any more."

"I hate the idea of people speculating. I wish you hadn't seen so much of her."

"That's been your doing, not mine. You've had her around morning, noon and night!"

"Well, if you think I'm going to give up my friends!"

"And if you think I'm going to get out of the house, lest they fall in love with me!"

They had not spoken for ten blocks when they reached Madison Square Garden.

CHAPTER XVII

MOLLY SKIPS HER DAILY LETTER

MR. OLIPHANT sat up very straight on the narrow seat of the bus as he and Molly drove home from the Museum. His hands played incessantly with the ribbon of his glasses. Every now and then his nose twitched, wrinkling like a rabbit's. He stared out of the window, with stiff, blind eyes, as though his consciousness were all inside himself. Once Molly spoke to him.

"I think that was the biggest crowd we've had yet, Uncle Joe."

"What's that? What's that? A big crowd? Very big! Too big! I found it most trying. All those strangers. The absurd questions they ask! I really think I shall have to find some method of keeping these talks private. It might be a good thing to have a certain afternoon in the week reserved for students, the galleries closed to the public—say for three hours. A good idea! A very good idea! I shall take it up with the directors. The present conditions are quite intolerable. Quite intolerable!" He relapsed into himself with a series of grunts.

Molly smiled in the softness of Aunt Jane's muff. Uncle Joe was really delightful. He was like a child

in the intensity of his feelings and the unrestrained way in which he gave them expression, each passing feeling. By the time he had had his cup of tea he would be delighted with the afternoon—to-morrow he would be boasting of the size of his audience.

The rest of their slow way they made in silence. Molly had to rouse him when they reached their street.

"Here we are at Madison Square, Uncle Joe."

The chimes in the tower were ringing the hour, Molly looked up at them. "Aren't they lovely, Uncle Joe?"

"Lovely? They are very poor chimes. Very poor indeed! Consider the Belgian Carillons."

Once in the studio his good temper returned with a rush. He settled back against the cushions of the divan with a sigh of satisfaction. "This is very nice, Molly Alloway. I was hoping for a quiet cup of tea with you. I'm glad you didn't go to the Aldens'. I'm getting old, you know. I didn't used to get tired so easily. I'm all in this evening. Nor so easily irritated. That boy with the red cravat and the impertinent eyes—I found him very trying, really very trying. He seemed to think he knew so much better than I did about everything. I don't see what he wanted to come for."

He twirled his mustache gently, purring like a cat while Molly set the kettle to boil.

"I think there's some of that cake left you bought the other day. In the cupboard there, Molly. On the top of the paint box. No, no, under it. I remember

I hoped that would keep the mice out. You don't mind if I smoke, do you?"

"Not in the least."

"You know you've been a great comfort to me this winter, Molly. Without you my life would have been a pretty blank proposition,—Molly Prioleau." He whispered the name. "Well, well! It's strange how things work out in this world. Is the water boiling already, my dear? That's an excellent kettle you bought me."

He got up from the divan and came and sat beside her, very stiff on a straight chair.

"Thank you, my dear. It's very thoughtful of you to remember how I like it."

He sipped his tea in silence, and nibbled his cake, bird-like.

"Well, my dear, what do you think about Adelaide?"

"About Adelaide?" repeated Molly. "What about her?"

"Her engagement, I mean."

Molly looked up with eager curiosity. "Is Adelaide engaged?" she exclaimed.

"That's what I'm asking you. Isn't she?"

"Not that I know of. To whom? Why——! Not Allen Carmichael!"

"There, you see!"

Molly leaned over to turn off the heater. The switch stuck. "I hadn't thought of it before," she said. "What made you think of it?"

"What?" repeated Mr. Oliphant. "Not a doubt

of it! Not the shadow of a doubt! I may be a little previous about it—that's the only possible doubt. This afternoon settled the question in my mind. It was never love of art took Master Allen to the Museum."

"No," admitted Molly, "I don't suppose it was."

"Not only that, but this going into business. It's reverting to the old plan all along the line."

"You mean going into Mr. Alden's office? He told me about that, how it was arranged when he was a child. But what has that got to do with Adelaide? She can't marry every young man whom her father takes into his office, can she?"

"All part of the same plan. Don't you know about it? No, how should you? Their parents' idea from the very beginning was that they should marry, and two,—how many? Three or four perhaps,—years ago, they were ready enough to carry it out, both of them. Would have liked to go off to Africa together, the scatter pates, but Jim Alden wouldn't have it. Said Allen should settle down or he shouldn't have Adelaide. And his mother said he shouldn't settle down till he had seen something of the world and was sure he wanted to."

"It seems to have been largely an affair of fathers and mothers," said Molly. "Didn't they have anything at all to say about it?"

"For my part I never had the slightest doubt they had it all arranged between themselves,—just as it's working out now. They were forbidden to have any arrangement, but I have no doubt they had one just the same. And, of course, the fathers and mothers

had the whip hand—the purse strings. I doubt if even Jim Alden would have approved of Allen going into business against his mother's wishes and having her leave all her money away from him, which she threatened to do. It was much wiser to have him travel for a while as she wanted him to. Now he can do as he pleases. And you see what that is! It's just as plain as the nose on your face—(not that that's plain at all, Molly, it's very charming). You'll see. We'll be told about it soon."

"It does seem likely," agreed Molly, taking the teacups over to the basin.

Mr. Oliphant was rubbing the tips of his fingers together, and smiling, blinking behind his glasses. "Of course it's only my imagination," he said. "I may be all wrong. But it's remarkable how often I'm right. It's a great amusement, Molly, you'll find when you're my age, to dream for your friends and plan happiness for them. Then when your dreams come true, you're happy in their happiness. And that's a great thing when you have no dreams left yourself, and no happiness of your own,—not that that time will ever come to you, my dear."

"You never can tell," said Molly, coming back from washing the teacups. "You know, I'm awfully tired, Uncle Joe. I think I'll go home."

Mr. Oliphant looked at her anxiously, readjusting his glasses on the tip of his nose and letting them fall again to the end of their tether.

"You do look tired, Molly Alloway. What have you been doing with yourself? You mustn't work so

hard. Certainly you ought to go home. I'm going to get a taxi for you. Sit back there among the cushions while I telephone for one. Good gracious me, Molly! What am I going to do with you if you get sick on my hands?"

Molly got between him and the telephone. "No, please, Uncle Joe. I'd rather walk. I'm not that kind of tired. It's just stuffiness. I guess it comes from overplay rather than overwork."

Mr. Oliphant forgot the telephone. "By the way, that reminds me. I've been thinking, Molly. Everybody has been very nice to you this winter. There must be a hundred people you owe invitations to. You ought to pay them off before Lent comes. I have been thinking it would be a very nice thing to give a little tea here, you and I together. You can ask anybody you want, and I shall ask a few of my friends whom I want to have see your work. We'll have a little exhibition. It's too soon for you to have a formal one, but a small informal exhibition is just what you need. I want people to have you in mind as one of the coming artists. We'll show your picture of the studio,—of course that was a fluke. I don't expect you to do another as good for at least five years, but a fluke shows what's coming. And we'll have Mom Clio, and we'll have some of your studies. Half a dozen pictures in all. What day shall it be, Molly?"

"Oh, Uncle Joe, that's awfully nice of you. But really you oughtn't to take all that trouble. You've done so much already."

"I'm not going to take any trouble," he assured her.

"You're going to do it all. I shall ask my own friends and pick out the pictures I want to show, and the rest will be in your hands. Now go home and rest, my dear. Make your list and decide on the day. You really think it will do you good to walk?" He turned her collar up and fastened it close around her neck. "Wrap up well. It's getting cold again and it's very damp. Good-night, dear child." He raised her hand and kissed the tips of her fingers. "Molly Prioleau," he whispered as the door closed.

He went to the window and stood there looking out till he saw Molly cross the street, and he followed her with his eyes till he lost her in the dusky street.

Molly walked quickly. The fog had shut in again, and the air was choking. Washington Square, when she reached it, was a lake of pinkish murk, bordered with dull lights. It was still and gloomy. Molly turned away from it with a shiver, hurrying up the steps of Mrs. Clendenning's house. She went to her window, but instead of dragging her table close to it and writing to Jane as usual, she pulled down her blind to shut out the gloom. For the first time since she had been away from home she skipped her daily letter.

CHAPTER XVIII

THE STUDIO PARTY

ADELAIDE ALDEN came down the steps before Mary Carmichael had been waiting more than a minute.

"It's very nice of you to stop for me like this," she said, getting into the car. "Our car has gone downtown for Daddy. Imagine Daddy wanting to go to a tea party! Molly has 'a way with her' with old people, hasn't she? It ought to be good fun, I think. Just a little out of the ordinary."

"Will it be? I've hardly seen Molly lately, and I haven't heard much about it. Long-haired art and that sort of thing?"

"No, not long-haired. Uncle Joe's friends aren't that variety. They don't have to label themselves. People can tell they are artists by looking at their pictures."

"It will be fun meeting them. I suppose you know most of them already, don't you?"

"Some, but not as many as Molly. She's the favored mortal."

"He certainly has given her a wonderful winter. What's she been doing with herself lately? She used to come in to tea all the time. Now she hasn't been near us for a week."

"I think she's been busy with this tea. I've seen her in the mornings at the studio of course, but apart

from that hardly at all. She always says she has too much to do to go out in the afternoon when I ask her. She's looking tired."

"Yes. I asked her to go to the theatre the other evening but she said she was trying to make up arrears of sleep. I guess she needs it. She's a wonderful little person. She's had such a success here this winter that you'd think her head would be turned, but it isn't in the least. She's just as nice and simple as the day she arrived." She gave an amused laugh. "Of course she's always had an independent little manner of taking it all for granted."

"Yes, and it irritates me sometimes. When you do something for a person you do like to know that it's appreciated. Molly always has the appearance of saying, 'Thank you, I've enjoyed it very much but so have you and if you don't care to do it again it's all one to me.'"

"Exactly," agreed Mary. "And you have enjoyed it, and if you didn't want to do it again you wouldn't."

"I don't care. We've done an awful lot for her, you and I."

"Not a bit more than we've wanted to. I haven't asked her once when I wasn't really anxious to hear that little chuckling laugh of hers. I love it, the way it comes bubbling up into her eyes. And anyway, she's paying off her social debts to-day, isn't she?"

"Uncle Joe's paying them off for her."

"It comes to the same thing as far as we're concerned. So your father's coming? I wonder if he'll bring Allen."

"Is Allen coming?"

Mary gave a little shrug. "I don't know. Nothing in the world seems able to tear him away from his business."

"Papa's delighted," said Adelaide. "He says he's doing splendidly, but that he's getting awfully tired looking."

"He is. He ought to have waited a little longer before beginning, I think. I'm afraid he isn't strong enough to keep it up long. Did you ever see such a day?"

The rain was whipping around the corners of the buildings in long white drops, rebounding off the pavements and rushing down the gutters in broad streams.

"I don't believe there'll be anybody there," said Adelaide. "Not more than half a dozen people."

But in front of Mr. Oliphant's studio there was already a line of cars.

The studio was in gala trim. The dividing curtain had been pulled back, making one great room of the whole. The corners were banked with flowers, great sheaves of them, in shining copper vessels and blue Chinese vases and faience bowls. Their perfume drowned the smell of oil and turpentine which generally made the air stifling. Molly's pictures were not visible.

"Where are they?" asked Mary, looking around.

Molly pointed to the far end of the room, where, under the edge of a curtain, the bases of half a dozen easels were visible. "They're back there," she said. "Uncle Joe insisted on having it that way. He's go-

ing to draw it back at what he considers the psychological moment and let them shine forth in all their glory. They'll quite dazzle people, won't they?" she laughed with a little shrug. "I hate it, Mary! I do wish he wouldn't! But when Uncle Joe will, he will, you know. And how can the likes of me object? I told him it was theatrical but he pooh-poohed the idea."

"I don't see why you should mind," said Mary. "I think it's fine. People will pay more attention than if they looked at them between mouthfuls of ice-cream."

The room was filling little by little. The scent of the flowers was becoming oppressively heavy; the hum of the voices, a buzz that vibrated in the head. The color in Molly's cheeks was deepening and burning. Mr. Oliphant was beginning to fret restlessly.

"The room is dreadfully crowded, Molly. I didn't realize we had asked so many people. No one will be able to appreciate the pictures in this atmosphere. Somebody ought to open a window somewhere. Here! Allen Carmichael! See what you can do about it. It's time now, Molly. I'm going to draw the curtain. Don't look so frightened. It's going to be a real triumph, a real triumph!"

It was he who looked the most frightened as he pushed his way through the crowd toward the easels. He straightened his shoulders nervously, threw back his head with a jerk and turned around to face his guests, clearing his throat audibly. Everyone heard him and stopped talking. He cleared his throat again, twirling

his mustache frantically. His glasses tinkled against the buttons of his waistcoat.

Mary caught Molly's fingers and squeezed them.

Mr. Oliphant began to speak.

"My friends,—er—er—my friends and Molly Alloway's friends: I have invited you here to-day to ask you a question. Do you agree with me that Molly Alloway is an artist? That she is going to be a great artist? Probably as great an artist as her age will produce? I am going to show you some of her pictures, and I will ask you to remember that she has been studying, seriously studying, for less than six months. You might easily forget that. But then genius doesn't come through study. It's there, or it isn't there—or it isn't." The last sentence was lost to his listeners. He had turned his back on them and was searching for the curtain cord.

The curtain stuck and went back in little jerks, revealing the pictures inch by inch. The first to be uncovered was the studio study of Adelaide and the model. With the light streaming full upon it it shone like a jewel; the clear depth of the coloring as rich and warm as an old master's; the grace and balance of the composition, and the vividness of the two figures, arresting and heart-gripping. There was a slight stir in the room, and silence. The curtain jerked on back, Mom Clio appeared, crude beside the other picture but bold and telling and pathetic, then the quiet melancholy river with the "sperrets" floating over the water, then Jane standing in a doorway, looking out with contagious laughter, and finally a dull painstaking

still life—a broken bowl, a plate, an onion and the skull.

Mr. Oliphant stood blinking behind his glasses, rubbing his thumbs and forefingers together, looking at the floor as though he didn't care, while the silence hung for a moment after they were all unveiled. Then a hum of voices began and grew louder. Someone said "Three cheers for Molly Alloway," and the room rang with them. Mr. Oliphant raised his head and looked around him with a triumphant smile, nodding and twirling his mustache.

Old Mr. Alexander Stuart slapped him on the back. "Bravo, Joe! This is another feather in your plumed cap. Three cheers for Molly's teacher, Joe Oliphant." And the room rang with these, too.

The red flooded Mr. Oliphant's face and his eyes winked rapidly. "Never heard of such a thing! On my honor I never heard of such nonsense! Look here, Alec!" He caught his arm and swung him abruptly around to examine the "Studio Study," presenting a stiff back to the laughing room.

Molly had only a muddled impression of what was going on, of people pressing close around her, shaking her hand and saying congratulatory words which she answered mechanically. She felt a little dizzy after the cheering. She had not expected that. Mr. Stuart as he turned to her from the "Studio Study" was the first person whose meaning cut clearly to her mind when he spoke to her.

"You're going to exhibit it at the Academy this autumn, of course."

It was still an effort to focus her mind. "I don't know."

"Don't know! Nonsense. Of course you are. All the town will want to see it. It will be a triumph, not only for you but for Oliphant. I wish I had a pupil who could paint like that. You owe it to him to show it. You mark what I say, a teacher's pupils are his masterpieces. It's on them his reputation rests and you owe it to Joe Oliphant to show that picture."

"I owe everything to Uncle Joe," answered Molly smiling. "And of course I'd love to show it if he wants me to. The only reason I say I don't know is because he hasn't said anything about it yet and it depends entirely on him."

"I'll speak to him then. The Academy needs that picture."

Adelaide Alden, standing a few feet off, bit her lip. This scene was like one of her dreams come true, except that she was not the centre of it. Molly caught her eye and smiled at her, joyful and radiant, but her answering smile dulled the radiance a little and Molly, turning to answer someone who spoke at her elbow, was conscious of a cloud, like a thin veil over the brightness of her joy.

Instinctively the people were dividing into two groups, the artists gathering close around the "Studio Study" with audible criticisms while the others in an outer circle kept their comments discreetly under their breaths.

Mrs. Eustis, studying the "River Scene" through her lorgnettes, put her hand on Molly's arm and drew

her toward her. "Tell me, child, what is the meaning of this picture. What do those gray things represent?"

"They're spirits," said Molly. "It represents a story Grandpa tells. He says the night of the earthquake he was standing on the terrace at Myrtle, my grandmother's place, watching that little church across the river, which was reeling like a drunken thing as though it must fall any minute, and suddenly he saw gray things rise up as though out of the ground in the churchyard, and come drifting out into the clear space on the river and flit and hover about like bats on the surface of the water till the dawn broke and he lost them in the silver shine."

Mrs. Eustis turned her lorgnettes on Molly. "And you really believe he saw spirits?"

Molly stuck out her chin a little. "I believe exactly what he told me, that he saw gray things like puffs of steam rise up from the ground and dance over the river."

"You dear, quaint child." Mrs. Eustis tapped her gently with her closed lorgnettes. "Perhaps he saw something, if he says he did. But they certainly were not spirits, you know. Nobody can see spirits."

Something in the tone of Molly's voice had made Mr. Oliphant swing around toward her from the group of artists, and he joined in the conversation now.

"I don't agree with you, Mrs. Eustis. I don't agree with you at all. Some people do see spirits. They see them in everything. Artists do. That's why they're artists. Molly does. She couldn't paint if she

didn't. That picture, of course, makes them visible to the blind. But"—he pointed to "Mom Clio," "to the eyes that see there's a spirit there, too, and in that," he pointed to the "Studio Study," "and even in that." He turned to the "Still Life." "Wonderful the life she gets into inanimate objects. Little short of wonderful."

Mrs. Eustis lifted her shoulders in the least perceptible shrug. She suspected rebuke in Mr. Oliphant's words and she was more accustomed to deference.

"Life in that skull?" she inquired with raised eyebrows. "Come here, Allen." She caught him as she had caught Molly with a hand laid on his arm as he passed. "What sort of a spirit is it that Molly has put into that skull?"

"What——?" He looked questioningly from her to Molly and back again. "Why—Miss Alloway and I discussed that the other day."

Mrs. Eustis opened her lorgnettes again with a little click and examined the picture. "Then there really is meant to be one? What is it, Molly?"

"Nothing," said Molly.

Mrs. Eustis laughed. "But I must see the spirit, child. I will not be called blind. Allen, what is it? What did you and Molly say about it the other day?"

"I——" Allen hesitated. He could see that Molly was uncomfortable. But not only Mrs. Eustis but a circle of people who had gathered round them were looking curiously at the picture and waiting for his answer. He had to say something. "We weren't talking about spirits. Nor even about the picture."

About the skull itself." He pointed to where it stood among the flowers on the table. "I said he had been a man like any of us once and lived and—and hated—and loved ——"

"Love?" interrupted Mrs. Eustis triumphantly while a little wave of laughter swept around the circle. "It's an original conception, certainly."

Molly's face went suddenly white. "Don't, please!" she exclaimed, "I hate the thing!"

"It looks more like hate," said Adelaide.

Mrs. Eustis dropped her lorgnettes to the end of their pearl chain. "Well, if you artists don't know yourself what the spirit is, I don't see how *we* poor laymen can be expected to recognize it." She looked around her and the laugh, amused and friendly, rose a little louder, but fell again as Molly's expression became more troubled. "Good-bye, Molly. I've enjoyed myself very much. It's been quite an unusual party and well worth coming out on such a day. How the wind whistles around this old place. Good-bye, Mr. Oliphant."

"Heu!" he grunted as she turned away.

Allen looked at Molly, who had turned her back on the room for a minute and was looking out at the crowded street. Her profile was very white. It struck him suddenly that she was thinner than she had been.

"I'm sorry I—I ought not to have said what I did, but ——"

Her face flushed red as he spoke to her. "You didn't say anything. I know I'm an idiot." She gave

a rather forced laugh. "But I do hate the thing. I think perhaps I'm a little scared of it. Anyway I don't like it laughed at."

She turned to say good-bye to someone else.

The room was slowly becoming empty. The artists lingered longest, grouped around the "Studio Study." After a while Molly and Mr. Oliphant were left alone.

He sat down on the divan, twirling his mustache and giving his habitual contented purr. "Well, Molly Alloway. That was a success. You had a triumph, my dear, a real triumph. And so did I."

"Yes."

He looked at her quickly, her voice sounded so dull.

"Molly! You're not thinking about that idiot woman."

Molly shook her head.

"You mustn't let a person like that disturb you. She isn't worth it."

Molly made an effort. "No, of course. It's childish of me. Only it was being all wrought up and excited and—I hate that skull! And—and I don't think people ought to laugh at spirits, even if there aren't any, but, of course, there are. The only question is are they around here and are they visible? I'm not sure, Uncle Joe, are you? You remember, down at home you said they were thick, and you wanted to go to Myrtle to put them to sleep. People do say they've seen them, though I never have."

Mr. Oliphant patted her smooth brown head as gently as though it were a little bird.

"Molly Alloway! Molly Alloway! You dear child!

You are overwrought. Of course you've never seen a spirit. You're too young. We old people are the ones who see them. All those of the past, those we've loved. They're thick down there at Alloway and Myrtle for me, Molly. But that ——!" he gave the skull an impatient push. "There's no spirit there, not for you nor for me, Molly. It's a chunk of dry bone, the kind dogs gnaw!"

Molly turned away from it with a little shudder.

Mr. Oliphant looked at her anxiously, screwing up his eyes behind his spectacles.

"Are you ill, Molly? Here! You must go home. You must go home to bed this very minute. I shall drive you down and see that you get there safely. You have been overdoing it, Molly. You ought to know better. I'm angry with you! Yes. I'm very angry."

* * * * *

Allen helped his sister and Adelaide into the motor, holding an umbrella over their heads as they crossed the wet sidewalk.

"Well, good-night, Adelaide," he said. "See you later, Mary."

"Why, aren't you coming?" she exclaimed. "I thought I heard you say good-bye."

"Oh, yes. I'm not going back. I want to walk."

"In this rain!"

"Surely. It won't hurt me."

Mary shrugged her shoulders. "Of course if you want to! But it looks as though we were not much of an attraction, doesn't it, Adelaide?"

"Pshaw, Mary! I've been indoors all day. I must have some air!"

"Trot along then. You're likely to get a good deal of water thrown in."

The door slammed and they drove off.

Mary looked back out of the rear window. "Did you ever know anybody as absurd as he is? To want to walk in this weather, when the car is right here! You know I think it really was that he didn't want us. Molly behaved in the queerest way about that skull, and I think he felt badly, though it wasn't his fault. What do you suppose was the matter with her? She really looked as though she had seen a ghost."

"They both looked as though they had seen a ghost," said Adelaide.

* * * * *

Night came. In the sure quiet people dreamed and pondered, looking backward and forward into their lives.

Adelaide Alden made an impatient little kicking gesture at her dog, then she caught him in her arms impulsively.

"Oh, your mistress is a fool! A perfect fool! It's fair play and the game to the best man. And it's poor sport, it's no sport at all to be a sulky loser. But it isn't a game, Pup! It's all the world. It's everything there is that's worth living for. Everything—everything! I won't lose! I can't lose! Oh, I'm a fool! A perfect fool!"

CHAPTER XIX

UNCLE JOE WRITES A LETTER

THE little marqueterie desk shivered on its slim legs as though it sympathized with the effort which was making on its smooth top. The strain of a difficult letter! Mr. Oliphant's whole face twitched and wrinkled. Behind his glasses his eyes blinked rapidly. His pen scratched. He wrote with a sharp point like a Frenchman, and before each capital letter his hand made a flourish in the air. Every now and then even his sentences took a French inversion. Letter writing always carried his mind back to student days in Paris. He had not done much of it since then.

Behind him on the divan under the window Molly Alloway was busy sorting miniatures.

"TO ROBERT MANIGAULT IZARD ALLOWAY, ESQ.,
Alloway Place-on-the-Cooper,
Post-office, Four Oaks, S. C.

"My dear Bob:

"I am sending your Molly back to you. She is not well. It is best she should be at home. There is nothing serious to worry over, but I feel the responsibility of having her under my care. She herself demurs at leaving her work before the year is out, but I can see that 'au fond' she is glad to be going back to you. I believe, I am——"

"Uncle Joe, Alice Dickin still has Oliver's 'Lady B——.' You remember you said she could take it home and study it. You won't forget to ask her for it, will you?"

"No, my dear, I won't forget."

"I think I'd better pin a note to your easel."

"—I am sure she has overtired herself. I consider myself very deeply to blame in having allowed her to do so. Had I the slightest reason to suspect that she was overtaxing her strength I should have insisted on her taking more rest. But, except on one previous occasion, after a hard day on her feet, she has never confessed to ——"

"They're all mixed up, Uncle Joe! I do wish you wouldn't let them go through them by themselves. They're not a bit careful. I can't find number thirty-one at all, and I don't remember anyone taking it."

"Oh, my dear! I did it! You'll find it on the stool there, by my palette, under the paints, I'm afraid. I thought I remembered a similarity in the treatment of the eyes in it and that portrait of mine. I took it out to compare them and I must have forgotten to put it back."

"—being tired. She has always shown herself as cheerful and ready as the day—a charming companion. I expect with confidence that a few weeks with you will restore her vitality.

"There is but one thing which causes me any real anxiety. She has lost interest in her painting. She does not admit it, has never even alluded to it, but ——"

"Uncle Joe! You've got yellow ochre all over the frame, and—yes! Uncle Joe, there's a stone out!"

"Oh, to be sure, Molly Alloway! I let it drop and one fell out. But I found it. I have it in my pocket—"

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in one of my pockets—I wonder whether it was this coat? Yes, here it is, my dear child.”

“Honestly! It’s ridiculous to be so careless.”

“I’ll take it and have it replaced, Molly, if you’ll do it up for me, and make a note of that too, my dear.”

“—but I can see it in the character of her work. The subjects she chooses are simply banal. There is no soul in them. Her heart is elsewhere. She works mechanically—like an uninspired person. I cannot explain to myself the reason. It is such a sudden change and so unexpected, coming as it did on the top of one of the greatest and the most spontaneous triumphs I have ever seen accorded to a student. I suppose she has written to you about the little entertainment I gave to do her honor. I exhibited on that occasion some half dozen of her pictures, those which I considered most characteristic of her genius. I had invited a group of the finest ——”

“Oh pshaw!”

The drawers of the little desk opened and banged shut again with such force that it nearly fell off its feet.

“What’s the trouble, Uncle Joe?”

“This pen splutters! I bought a whole box of new ones the other day, and someone has already taken ——”

“In the cloisonné bowl right there beside you.”

“Thank you, Molly.”

“—artists and the most famous critics in the country. I asked them to express their opinion concerning her. It was unanimous,—a Daniel come to Judgment,

'a new star in the firmament.' I fear my similes are trite. They have spoken to me about her many times since, with undimmed enthusiasm. A member of the Committee on Admission has asked me privately to see that a certain canvas, a remarkable study of the interior of the studio with the class at work, shall be entered for the Autumn Academy. I am confidently expecting it may win an important prize. Yet Molly falls back into a sort of apathy,—I cannot, perhaps, say quite that, but the fires in her eyes do not light, or at least do not burn brightly. I can only explain it to myself in one way. It has all been very strange to her, and the adjustment to her new surroundings has put more of a strain upon her than she has let us see. And then the little entertainment was too much of an excitement."

"Molly, when is Adelaide coming back?"

"I don't know."

"What is she doing with herself? She ought not to break into her winter like this."

"I don't know what she's doing. Nothing special, I think."

"Where is she?"

"I heard she had gone out to their place at Clam Neck, but I'm not sure."

"Doesn't she write to you?"

"No."

"Nor to Mary Carmichael?"

"I don't know. I haven't seen Mary for some time."

Mr. Oliphant let his glasses drop off his nose, and looked at her, tapping the desk with his pen. He grunted.

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"I wish you would ——"

"What, Uncle Joe?"

"Never mind. I'll do it myself, after I've finished this. Have you and Adelaide quarreled?"

"Oh, no! Not a word. Only I just haven't felt like writing, and I suppose she hasn't either."

"——was too much of an excitement ——"

With an extra flourish of his hand he began again.

"This seems to have been the proverbial straw, and her nerves, overstrained already, have in some measure given way.

"Do not press her to paint until she herself proposes it. I feel sure the desire must awake again as soon as her strength returns. To force it now might kill it. It is largely for this reason that I insist on her going. Were she willing to do so, it would, I think, be as well for her to stay here and loaf till the end of the season, let her brush lie. But she seems constitutionally unable to be idle.

"She will leave a great void in my life. Do not for a minute, I beg of you, let the thought rest in your mind, or in hers, that she is in any way indebted to me. She has more than earned every advantage she has enjoyed. I have felt a new security in leaving my studio and all the valuable things it contains, in her hands. They have been cared for as never before. It is a different place from what it was when she arrived."

"Uncle Joe, I've finished this catalogue. I'm going to put them all in the inner compartment of the cabinet here, I've found the key, and I'm going to lock them up so nobody can get at them without asking you—

unless they're burglars. You keep a real paradise for burglars, Uncle Joe, and you know they're going to come and enjoy it some day."

"I don't think there's much danger, Molly. There is someone here most of the day, and the night watchman——"

"Sleeps soundly in the hall all night. I told you that little fiddler man you've given the end room to said he's tripped on him on the stairs twice when he was coming in very late."

"Well, my dear, the burglar would have tripped too. As a matter of fact, McIfney did catch a man that way once. I don't believe in borrowing trouble."

"I'm going to put the catalogue in with them."

"—I have found a new harmony among my students. None of the old incessant quarrels, if they have taken place, have reached my ears. She has shown wonderful tact in handling difficult situations, and the few times on which she has sought my advice, I have followed hers. I should like to believe she would come back here in the same capacity another year, but she will have outgrown the place. She has spoiled me for another monitor.

"And she has been more to me than this. She——"

"I'm going now, Uncle Joe. I still have quite a lot of packing to do."

"Well, my dear child, I'm very much obliged to you for putting those miniatures in order, very much indeed. Shall you stop on your way down and say good-bye to the Carmichaels? You will be just about in time for tea, I think."

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"I'm afraid I shan't have time. I really have a lot to do still, and I promised Mrs. Clendenning I'd be home to tea if I could. I'll try to stop in to-morrow and say good-bye to Mary if I get a chance. Otherwise, I'll write to her."

"That won't do, Molly Alloway! You must go. I insist upon it."

"I expect to, unless something unforeseen prevents. I meant to have gone yesterday."

He got up and went to the door with her. "Wait a minute, my child, the stairs are dark. Let me turn on the light for you." He felt along the wall, standing on tiptoe to reach the switch. "There! Good-night. Shall you stop here in the morning?"

"Oh, yes indeed. Good-night, Uncle Joe."

He went back to his desk.

"—She has been a daughter to me. You—lucky Bob Alloway—do you know what that means? You do not! It is only through lack and longing that we learn. You with your wife and your children and your grandchildren. You do not know what they mean!

"I have had a happy winter.

"She leaves to-morrow by the evening train, and should reach you by noon the next day. Doubtless she has already written and you are expecting her.

"I hope to give myself the pleasure of paying you a visit when the spring reaches the North, if you will allow me. Please present my regards to your grandchildren and to Miss Jane if you see her before this letter passes from your memory.

"Very cordially yours,

"JOSEPH D. OLIPHANT."

CHAPTER XX

ADELAIDE WRITES THREE LETTERS

THE house was very quiet, with the quiet of vacancy. A door slamming somewhere in the distance made Adelaide Alden look up from the fire she was laying, to listen. She glanced interrogatively at the small dog licking the mud from his paws on the hearth rug. Reassuringly he wiggled one ear; and she turned back to the fire.

Sitting on the floor beside the dog, she stretched out her stockinged feet to the fire, and settled herself comfortably to read a packet of letters. One was in Mr. Oliphant's spidery writing.

"My dear Adelaide: I trust you are not ill that you are neglecting your work in this way. But nothing else would, in my opinion, justify you in doing so. You are at a critical point in your education. You have come near to the top of one of those mountain ranges which lie in the path to success. A little more effort and by the time summer comes you will find yourself looking down into a new valley of achievement, and seeing way off in the distance, a new mountain range, hazy and alluring, to approach and ascend. Stop now, even for a few months, and you must inevitably drop back into the valley from which you have come. To make the climb up a second time you will find almost unsupportable drudgery. Believe me, my child, I have seen much talent wrecked on the rock of

an untimely holiday. You risk remaining to the end of your career a gifted amateur with a knack at likenesses and a certain facility with your brush. In a few months you can rest for a year, if you want, and do yourself no harm. Now you must go forward or back. It is for your own good that I speak thus, like a book, but not only for your own good. You have the gift of beauty. To find this gift and bring it to light is my duty as a teacher. You will excuse me then if I interfere in what you consider your own business. Such talent as you have, my dear Adelaide, marks you a public servant. Either you must work or you must shirk.

"Molly Alloway has, as you doubtless know, gone home. I am sorry to have had her leave, but she was not well, and she has reached her mountain pass.

"I have felt in your work lately a certain discouragement, which has seemed to grow with Molly's success. If I have been right in this, I am sorry. Talent as great as yours need not be ashamed even before genius, and should be above jealousy. Believe me, my dear child, when I say this. You and I stand in the same position in regard to it. That my power has reached, quite likely passed its zenith, and that yours is still growing, makes no difference. The fact remains that in fifty years, and for all time, Molly's work will rank in a different class and a higher one, than either yours or mine.

"Molly tells me that you and she do not correspond. I am sorry for this. I hoped you would, indeed had, formed a friendship which would be equally valuable to both of you. Each of your lives holds so much that the other needs. Yours is so full of all the small happy things of the world, while hers has the one great 'fact.' I am not sure genius spells happiness, and I am jealous for happiness for little Molly. They tell you that genius breeds a certain melancholy, or at least

depression. Lately, Molly has seemed an example of this. It comes, I believe, from the same sensitiveness which enables her to feel beauty so unerringly. If there has grown up any coolness between you, I think this may be sufficient to account for her low spirits. Her studio picture is going to the Academy, by special request. You will appreciate what an honor this is. Can you not make it the occasion for an affectionate letter?

"Forgive the old Master's garrulousness, my dear Adelaide. My pupils are my children, you and Molly the two dearest among them. To have you both leave me like this, for causes which I do not understand, is very disturbing. Come back and ascend your mountain pass.

"Cordially yours,

"JOSEPH D. OLIPHANT."

"The poor old Master!"

Adelaide put the letter down and fell into a brown study, staring blindly into the fire and pulling gently at the dog's silky ears. She was not given to uncomfortable self-analysis. She acted, generally, on impulse. But sooner or later the time comes when one seeks the causes of impulse. Why had she come out here to this empty, lonely country house?—Because she wanted to. Why did she stay?—Again because she wanted to. Why shouldn't she write that congratulatory letter to Molly?—Because she didn't want to.

"All of which," she remarked to herself, giving the dog's ears a last pull which made him look up with a reproachful squeak, "is simply saying 'because.' The question, Adelaide Alden, is 'because why?' and don't you try to beg it!"

The logs burned through and fell apart; the clock tower on the village green chimed the quarter hours; the fire died and the sun set. When she moved at last she was cold and stiff.

Stretching like a cat, and shivering, she picked up the little yawning dog. "After all, Pup, it's what we do that matters, and not what we want. Anyway, that's all we can control." She lighted the fire again and sat down to write her letter to Molly. It was well done, but when it was finished she knew it was written by her brain and not by her heart, and she knew Molly would know it. She sealed it and took it out to the caretaker to be mailed, lest she should change her mind about sending it. After that she wrote to Mr. Oliphant.

"Dear old Master: Your letter has troubled me, and I'm coming back very soon. But you're wrong in thinking this has been an ill-timed holiday. It hasn't. I was stale; I needed it. And the proof of it is that I was discouraged. I felt as though I never wanted to touch a brush again in all my life—you must admit that afternoon was a bit discouraging to mere mortals! And now I have a picture in my head which is crying to be painted. I feel about it just as Molly described feeling about the studio picture before she painted it. I have great hopes of it, dear Master, and I'm going to stay out here till it's finished—and no longer than that, so don't worry about me.

"No, there is no coolness between Molly and me. If she is in bad spirits it is for another cause. I have written to her, though, as you suggest, to try to cheer her up. There really wasn't much more for me to say about the picture. I have said everything already.

However, I told her you had written me some more compliments about it. I shall keep congratulations on its going to the Academy till it actually goes. You will be wanting me to write again then, you know, and I mustn't use up all my ammunition at once. Au revoir, Mon Oncle."

Then she wrote a third letter.

"*Dear Mary:* Thanks for your invitation. I ought to have answered sooner, but I was not decided what to say—though, of course, there was no doubt what I wanted to say. Yes, I did come out here rather unexpectedly. I felt very tired and I made up my mind a little 'rustication' was what I needed, so I up and came. And until this morning I hadn't decided how much longer to continue my rest cure. Now I have. It's over. I'm simply staying on a little longer to do some painting I have in mind. I'd love to spend Sunday with you at Spring Harbor. It's always such fun. I shall probably see you before Saturday, so there is no necessity to go into the question of trains now.

"Affectionately yours,
"ADELAIDE."

CHAPTER XXI

HOME THROUGH NEW EYES

"CRABS! Crabs! Raw, raw crabs! Prawns!"

The resonant negro voice, lingering in sad minor cadences, woke Molly Alloway. She lay still listening to it. It was not time to get up yet. She knew how morning came to Charleston Battery. The crabman's call was the earliest sound. It came while out beyond the old guns, Sumter and Moultrie were still lost in glowing haze, while the birds in the live oaks were twittering their first attempt at a song. Close outside the window a mocking-bird was making a medley of sound, raucous cat-calls and purring trills and long, sweet, fluty notes jumbled together. Molly knew how he looked, balancing himself by his long tail on the sharpest point of the iron grating, but in the twilight he was hardly yet visible.

The sharp hoof-beats of the watchman's iron-shod horse echoed along the houses. It must be his last round. She listened for the quick soft patter of the unshod mules and the creak of the high-wheeled wagons coming in from the country with provisions. When she heard them it was time to get up.

"Jasmine! Jasmine! Sweet jasmine!"

The soft-voiced flower girls, lithe on their bare feet, were coming down the street, balancing big baskets on their heads.

One should be down-stairs by that time.

She ran out to the gate to buy from them. The jasmine was crushed into tight bunches and wilted by the clutch of hot little black hands, but some might revive. The sturdier stalked honeysuckle had fared better, and the snowy swamp lilies, with their juicy stems tied up in long wet strands of moss, looked stiff and fresh.

Molly was prodigal in her buying. One starves for flowers in the North. And the shining black faces were irresistible with their white-toothed smiles. The eager, grabbing little hands must each get their penny.

"Jasmine! Jasmine! Sweet jasmine!"

Her arms were full as she watched them go fluttering and calling down the street like a flock of black-birds.

"Charity! Charity! Come and take them!"

Charity thought they "was stuff," and went off grumbling.

"Put them on the table in the dining-room, Charity, and I'll come and fix them. I know they're nothing like as nice as Miss Jane's camellias, but then I want them. Don't grumble any more, but do as I say. Put them in a pail of water."

She didn't want to go back into the house yet. The air was caressing, warm with a little tang of the sea. The Battery was just waking to leisurely life. Little groups of white-clothed children, with their black mammies, were beginning to gather under the trees. Cousin Lea Izard came swinging along, exercising his pointers. He caught sight of her in the gateway and

took off his hat with a sweeping bow. Then he changed his course and came over to bid her welcome home. Later in the day he sent her a tiny little bouquet of variegated flowers.

Molly looked around with a sudden leap of tenderness. There was peace in the dreamy air down here. It seemed almost tangible. She felt the corners of her mouth lift in an effortless smile. Had she ever been away? It was all so natural it made the winter seem like a vanished dream. Everything which had worried her seemed suddenly unimportant. What did anything matter as long as one had all this, home and Jane? She was crazy to see Jane. She felt a sudden impatience about it. Aunt Jane ought not to have insisted on her staying in town over night. Of course she knew what it meant. Aunt Jane wanted to find out why Uncle Joe had sent her home. She gave a shrug. There wasn't any reason—no reason that mattered,—nothing mattered.

How lovely the old house was. Up North she had not seen any more beautiful. It was square, with a double flight of marble steps, railed with a lace-like grill, leading up to the front door. The two windows on either side had long carved leaves of marble, stained and faded to a creamy yellow which blended softly with the pink of the weathered brick, curling together over the tops. Wisteria vines, heavy with long blossoms, climbed everywhere, topping the tall fence and clinging to the edge of the steps. Over to the right they shrouded the ruin of the crumbling coach-house, making a frame at the peak of the roof for the marble

shield on which the Alloway arms were carved. Between the branches of the curving steps, at the end of a long arched passageway which ran through the house, one could see them again, shrouding the deserted "Slave quarters," at the back of the garden.

Slowly Molly came back into the house, looking about her with new eyes that saw things they had never noticed before, the dainty carving of the bannisters that ran round the hall balcony and down the stairs, ending at the newel post in a child's laughing face, the silent stateliness of the drawing-room which had come unscathed through two wars.

"I'm glad I went North and came back again," she said to herself with a contented chuckle, going out of the back door into the dilapidated garden. The camellias were in bloom, blazing bushes, a few iris here and there, and heliotrope and beds of violets buried among their leaves. The palmettos and oleanders and long-leaved bananas gave the place a tropical look.

"Molly!" A voice from an upper window made her look up. "'Have you had your coffee, Molly?'"

"Not yet, Aunt Jane."

"Come into the house and have it at once. Charity has it waiting for you. Then come up-stairs to me. I want to talk to you."

Molly came reluctantly.

CHAPTER XXII

GREAT-AUNT JANE

AUNT JANE's room was in the front of the house, in the corner. It had four big windows. Two of them overlooked the Battery and the Harbor beyond, and on clear days saw the straight blue line of the horizon. The other two looked into a little strip of the garden, and over the dividing wall into a little strip of the Manigault garden. It had always been the "best room." It was the room to which Priscilla Alloway had retired with her two daughters when six of General Clinton's officers were quartered in the house during the Revolution. The three ladies lived there all through the occupation in rather ostentatious seclusion, determined to be ill used, and seeking hardships to endure. The only hardship they found was unutterable boredom. To relieve it one of the daughters drew on the window-pane with the diamond in her ring. She made a sketch of the English ships lying in the harbor, and of a group of officers walking in the strip of garden. No one had opened that window for over a hundred years for fear of accidents. The room was still Priscilla's room. Even now Aunt Jane never thought of entering it without wishing her good-day. As for the young Alloways, they preferred not to enter it at all unless Aunt Jane was there,—especially not after dark.

Aunt Jane was sitting knitting by the window with the historical pane; being stuck tight it let in less wind than the others. With her stick alongside of her she reminded Molly of Whistler's "Mother," only she had a more determined look than that old lady. She had a very determined look. Molly felt the years roll off her. She remembered suddenly all the precepts she had forgotten months ago up North.

The old lady did not turn her head. "Is that you, Molly?"

"Yes, Aunt Jane."

"I have had a chair placed for you. Sit down, child."

The chair was directly in front of hers, so close their knees almost touched when Molly sat down. She pushed it back a few inches but Aunt Jane made her bring it forward again.

"Do not move away, Molly, I wish to see you. My eyesight is failing."

She put down her knitting and adjusted her glasses. She looked at Molly intently and silently, and her expression was not altogether pleasing.

Molly wriggled under her scrutiny.

"Sit still, Molly. You are old enough to have yourself under control. Is that the dress you traveled in?"

"Yes, Aunt Jane."

"When I was young, ladies did not appear in public in low neck."

Molly's hand shot to the V at her throat. "Oh, Aunt Jane, that isn't low! Honestly it wasn't the least bit conspicuous."

"Conspicuous!" Aunt Jane's lips curled back from the word as though it had a bad taste in her mouth. "Take your hands down from your throat, Molly. How often must I tell you not to pick at your person? If you cannot control your fingers find something for them to do. You may knit a few lines on my shawl, if you like. Be sure you keep the tension even."

Molly took it gratefully, thankful of a refuge for her eyes. She bent low over the work. Aunt Jane watched her in silence.

"Have you got the tension right?" she asked when Molly had reached the end of one line and turned back again.

"Yes, I think so, Aunt Jane."

"Very well. Now I wish to hear an account of your trip."

Molly was silent and Aunt Jane repeated it.

"Do you hear me, Molly? I wish to hear an account of your trip."

"Yes, Aunt Jane. I was just wondering what part of it."

"The whole of it."

"But I have written to you."

"Fully?"

Again the forgotten precepts came to mind. Again Aunt Jane had to repeat her question.

"I said, Molly, have you written to me fully?"

"Why, of course, I couldn't tell you every little thing, Aunt Jane. But I never kept back anything which seemed of enough importance to tell." Those

forgotten precepts! She flushed. She knew Aunt Jane would see it.

Aunt Jane did see it. She considered for a few seconds in silence.

"I have gathered the impression," she said at last, "that your letters to Jane contained facts which were not in your letters either to your grandfather or to me. Of course I may be mistaken in this, but Jane has shown a certain hesitation in letting me read her letters. When I was young, a lady's letters were considered fit reading for every member of her family. If she had any private matter to discuss she addressed it to her mother, whose place I have endeavored to fill toward you, Molly."

In spite of the knitting Molly wriggled. "Yes, of course, Aunt Jane. And if I had needed advice of any kind I would have written to you about it. You know I did several times. But you see, not actually having any mother, and being out at Alloway so much without you, Jane and I have had to depend on each other more than sisters usually do, I suppose, and I wrote to her a little differently than to the rest of you,—more informally, I mean."

Aunt Jane's hands were lying apparently immovable in her lap, but a slight rhythmic contraction of the muscles of her wrists showed that she was keeping them so by industriously twirling her thumbs.

"I am not sure that I understand the exact meaning of the word informality as used in regard to letters. It might mean carelessness in the use of language, which is deplorable; or in the choice of words, the use of

slang, for instance, which is hardly admissible among educated persons; or it might mean the admission of ill-considered statements. The written word should be well weighed. I have been taught to consider informality an undesirable thing. I remember my dear mother repeating to me often, 'familiarity breeds contempt.' Formality is one of the safeguards of society. It need in no way interfere with affection, and it is not, in my opinion, wise to dispense with it, even toward members of one's own family, especially in the present state of the world."

Molly said nothing.

Aunt Jane continued. "There has been nothing in your letters either to your grandfather or to me which would have led us to suppose that your health was not good."

"Why of course not, Aunt Jane. It is good."

"It is on the score of ill health that Mr. Oliphant has sent you home."

Molly glanced up quickly. "Don't I look well?" she asked.

Aunt Jane seemed to hesitate before answering. "The absurdity of your mode of dress renders it difficult for me to judge," she said. She watched Molly grow red, and waited till her color died again. "You asked me of what part of your trip I wished an account. It is of that part which led to your unexpected return." She waited some moments for Molly to speak. "Well, Molly, do you hear me?"

"Yes, Aunt Jane, I was just wondering what to say. You see there wasn't anything that led up to my com-

ing home, unless it was everything. Uncle Joe got it into his head that I was too tired to make any more progress, and so he thought I had better stop painting."

"'Got it into his head.'" Aunt Jane's voice put quotation marks around the phrase. She half closed her eyes as though to get the full flavor of it. "Something must have put it into his head?" she remarked. "However, tell me something about your friends."

"I made so many of them, Aunt Jane."

"I am asking about friends, Molly, not acquaintances."

"Five months is too short a time to make real friends in, Aunt Jane. You know you have always told me you must know a person at least a summer and a winter before you could give them your confidence."

Aunt Jane's foot tapped the ground impatiently. "'You told me! You told me!'" she repeated. "I do not like you to quote me in that spirit, Molly."

It is terrible to sit under so close a scrutiny. Molly's needles whirled.

"You have let a stitch drop." Aunt Jane watched her in silence as she carefully picked it up. "Well, Molly, I am waiting."

"Yes, Aunt Jane. But I really don't know what to say. I suppose it's the Carmichaels and Adelaide Alden you want to hear about."

"I have gathered from your letters that they were the people with whom you were on terms of the greatest intimacy."

"Yes, but I haven't seen anything of them for—oh! for nearly a month, I guess—that is hardly anything."

"Indeed?"

"New York is such a big place one drifts away from people almost without realizing it."

"Did I not understand you to write that Miss Carmichael's house was within one block of Mrs. Clendenning's, and that Miss Alden was a fellow student of yours at Mr. Oliphant's school?"

"Yes. But I wasn't thinking of actual physical size so much. One becomes so used to distances, they don't seem to count for much after a while. But there are so many different kinds of interests, and so many different sets of people, and so many everything. I wasn't quoting you in any objectionable spirit, Aunt Jane, when I said you had told me it took at least a summer and a winter to make a friend in whom you could have confidence. What I meant was that I saw it was true. I can't imagine a place where it could possibly be truer than in New York."

The old lady's thumbs were twirling with almost painful energy. The muscles of her arms twitched nearly to her shoulders. Otherwise she was immovable.

"Am I to understand, Molly, that you found these friends of yours unworthy of your confidence?"

"Oh no, Aunt Jane!" Molly was beginning to feel rather muddled in this sea of words. She laughed. "How could I have? I didn't take any confidence up North with me, except a little for Uncle Joe. And he certainly didn't go back on it."

"Then I am quite at a loss to understand what you do mean."

Molly did not understand any too well herself.

"Why, Aunt Jane,—you see—they're very nice and hospitable, and—really it isn't the stranger who — Oh, it isn't a question of confidence. I seem to be getting all balled up. And I can't make you understand, because there isn't anything to understand."

"‘All balled up,’ Molly! You show your contact with people of a different class. But the phrase is expressive."

Molly's face was flushed and distressed. Suddenly, without warning, she burst into tears. "Oh, Aunt Jane! Please don't sit there like a stone, and ask one cold question after another. Of course there was something made me feel badly! Of course there was! But I didn't mean to speak of it to anyone, not even to Jane. But you've made me, and now you've got to be nice about it, you've just got to be nice or I shan't ever tell you anything again! Never! Never! Never!"

The knitting slipped to the floor. One of the ivory needles snapped under Molly's foot as she curled it round the rung of the chair. Aunt Jane leaned forward and laid her hand on her niece's knee.

"Go on, my child." Her voice had a quiver in it.

"You see, I thought we were friends,—real ones. And I did give them my confidence—I'd have told them almost anything—almost anything I'd have told you. And then I found they didn't feel like that about me, and it hurt me. It hurt me dreadfully when I found they weren't telling me things which I thought I had a right—as a friend—to know."

"What didn't they tell you, my child?"

"Why—why—all sorts of things."

"Can't you tell me one?"

"Why—why—that Adelaide was engaged to Allen, for instance."

"Oh! How did you learn it if they didn't tell you?"

"Uncle Joe told me."

"They had told him?"

"No, he guessed it. You see he knew they had wanted to be four years ago—only—— It's a long story. I can't tell you all about it. But anyway, it was easy enough to guess if you knew that." Molly was blowing her nose vigorously.

Aunt Jane seemed to be looking through her rather than at her. She was tapping the tips of the fingers of her two hands gently together.

"Guessing is very different from being told, Molly. In the first place there is always the possibility that you have guessed wrong"—Molly shook her head violently—"and in the second place there may be many reasons why one is not able to speak of an engagement, even to an intimate friend. I think you are unduly upset. Is that all?"

Her handkerchief now useless, Molly was snuffling. "I'm not upset!" she denied indignantly. "I'd never have mentioned it at all if you hadn't prodded me so!"

Aunt Jane lifted her eyebrows. "Is that all?" she repeated.

"Yes, that's all."

"Then we will let the matter drop."

"I've broken your needle."

"We will let that pass. I understand Mr. Oliphant was very well pleased with your progress in painting."

"Yes, he was."

"If I am not mistaken he considers you the best of his pupils,—better even than Adelaide Alden?"

"Yes. I can paint better than she does. Not always, but sometimes I can do better than she ever can."

"I should like to see some of your pictures. I suppose you have brought them home with you?"

"Yes. A lot of them."

"A number of them, Molly. I suppose, however, they have gone direct to Alloway. You have none with you?"

"Only the little sketch-book I always carry."

"Let me see it, my child."

Molly went out of the room.

Aunt Jane bent over and picked up her knitting. She sighed as she looked at the broken needle.

"It is very plain," she said, "perfectly plain. I always said no good would come of her going North. I suppose she has a picture of him in her sketch-book."

She had not the manner of a person talking to herself. Perhaps it was to Priscilla she was speaking.

CHAPTER XXIII

ADELAIDE VISITS MARY

THE day was untimely hot. In the city streets it felt as though someone had shut all the doors and windows. Out in the country there was more air, but the still leafless trees gave no relief from the unaccustomed burning of the motionless sunlight. Mary Carmichael, sitting in her new car, screwed her face up against it and blinked sleepily through one eye as she waited for the train. Adelaide Alden looked tired and uncomfortable when she stepped out of it. She gave a sigh of satisfaction.

"My! It's good to get here! It was perfectly beastly in town. Have you moved out for good yet?"

"No. Allen doesn't want to commute till he has to. I'm just picnicking. When did you get back from Clam Neck?"

"I only came down yesterday. I've been having a gorgeous time up there, painting, all by myself. Really did something I'm pleased with. I'm going to enter it at the Academy without telling Uncle Joe anything about it."

"What do you do that for?"

"Because I'm dead tired of having him compare everything unfavorably with Molly's things. You know he actually wrote me that there was no sense in being jealous of her because she was so much better

than I was, it was merely ridiculous, or words to that effect. Sort of arc-light and sun-light business. And I'm not at all prepared to admit that. I believe this thing I've done is almost as good, if not quite, as Molly's 'Studio Study.' And I'm going to send it to the Academy and see what happens. I shouldn't wonder if it got a prize, just as well as hers."

"What's the subject?"

"I'll show it to you sometime. Oh, Mary, you don't know what a lucky dog you are not to be blessed with ambition! The ups and downs of it! I'm in the seventh heaven now about that picture, but the depth I've climbed from! But say! You must have had a dreadful two years living all by yourself while Allen was away. I nearly died in that big empty house at Clam Neck. I turned on all the lights every evening to make it look something like cheerful, but it was so horribly silent. I don't see how you ever stood it for two whole years."

"A household makes more life around than one caretaker does. And you have guests and things. And, anyhow, I might as well get used to it, as I'm likely to have to do it most of my life."

"You? Why?"

"When Allen gets married, who am I to live with?"

She had no sooner said it than she wished she hadn't, but Adelaide showed not the slightest embarrassment.

"I should say you were quite as likely to get married as Allen is," she laughed. She was determined not to avoid Allen as a subject of conversation. "Is he out here to-day?" she asked.

"No. He won't take Saturday afternoons off."

"Why not? Papa does, and practically everybody else at the office, too."

"That's Allen's way. He always rides a hobby to death. It's absurd."

"It does seem rather absurd to stay in town on a day like this if you don't have to."

As a matter of fact Allen had not stayed in town.

Spring Neck Village lay on the Sound, a couple of miles from the station. They were approaching it now, coming out suddenly on a view of the Harbor, blue and still under the summer-like sky. The tide was flooding imperceptibly, with tiny restless waves creeping higher and higher up the banks. Out on a sand-bar Allen's sloop, with half a dozen men hanging over her sides, stood a-tiptoe in the ways, impatient to slip into the cool water.

The road skirted the shore with all the sea life of the village strung along it. A mixed odor of fresh paint and oakum and mussel-beds hung in the air.

Beyond the village, on the far side of a little reed grown cove which jutted in from the harbor, stood the Carmichael house, an old farmhouse, with white, square shingled sides and squat red chimneys. A narrow creek which ran down alongside it from the hills behind into the cove, had been dammed into a trout pond in which the fish were splashing hungrily after the early flies.

A car was just drawing up to the door as Mary and Adelaide turned in at the gate.

"Why that's Allen!" exclaimed Mary.

Adelaide said nothing. She was not sure whether she was glad or sorry. It had been a very peaceful feeling to think he was not coming, and that Mary and she would be by themselves, but she wanted to see him, too. If only things could be as they had been always! It seemed almost impossible as she and Mary drove up in the old familiar way to the old familiar house, that there could have been a change.

She called out to Allen before their car stopped, unconsciously using the old name of their childhood. "Hello, Boy."

He was unstrapping a valise from his car. He swung round with a startled expression when he heard her.

"Hello, Girl!" He came over to them. "I didn't know you were coming. Mary didn't ——"

"Yes, I did too," she interrupted.

"No, you didn't. Or if you did I forgot the date," he must be cordial, "and so I have all the pleasure of a surprise."

He opened the door of the car and gave Adelaide his hand to get out.

"Isn't it great here to-day?" she said. "It's the spring equivalent of Indian summer. Has it a name?"

"It ought to have. Great Scott, Mary! look at those fish. They're positively jostling each other! Haven't you taken one out since I've been away?"

Mary shook her head. "Not one. I never did like fishing for tame fish."

"Well, they're overcrowded now. They can't thrive like that. Want some for dinner?"

"Indeed we do! John! John! Come and take these things into the house, please." She went in, leaving Adelaide and Allen together.

Then she called to them out of the window. "If you want to have those trout for dinner, you'd better start catching them."

"Aren't you coming?"

"No. I can't. You and Adelaide go."

"Would you like to?" asked Allen.

"Yes, very much," answered Adelaide, wondering to herself whether, as a matter of fact, she would like to, or whether she wouldn't.

CHAPTER XXIV

ON THE TROUT POND

THE sun was setting. The pond, glassy and still, shone like burnished copper. The tiny wake of the drifting punt was like a ripple of fire, and the flies at the end of the lines, jerking softly over the surface of the water, strung a necklace of rubies behind them.

At the stern of the boat Adelaide paddled gently, while Allen, in the bow, cast. They had done the same thing a thousand times before.

The fish, unmolested for four years, were bold as well as hungry, and jumped at the flies the instant they struck the water.

"There's not much fun in this," he exclaimed. "We've only been here twenty minutes and I've got—six—seven."

"We can't eat more than that," said Adelaide. "You'd better stop."

"Just one more. Then I'll stop. Let's see if I can't get a big one."

He had hardly spoken before it was wriggling in his net. He reeled in his line. "There we are! The biggest of all—two and a half at a guess. Now I'll stop."

They were drifting in the centre of the pond in a well of light, which the shadows of the willows on the shore, deepening and creeping softly over the sur-

face of the water, banked all around with darkness. The round tops of the trees were lacy against the sky, while lower down between their trunks, the brilliant waters of the harbor flickered like smoldering fire. There were only far-away sounds. The little boat seemed cut away from the world, alone in the light.

Adelaide, sitting motionless, held her paddle across her knees. Two wills were striving to rule her. One bade her land and seek the companionship of Mary, the other, sit and drift, as in the old days they had loved to do. She could not bring herself to dip the paddle in the water and push the boat shoreward.

In the bow Allen moved restlessly. He swung round to face her, holding up the fish. "Aren't they beauties?" he said.

Adelaide was silent.

"So you and Mary haven't fished at all?"

"No, not once."

"But you've been out here, of course?"

"Not on the pond since you and I were last here together."

"Do you remember?" The recollection flooded back on him. "It was the night before I sailed. I felt as though it was the end of everything—and the beginning of everything."

"It was. '*Partir, c'est mourir un peu. C'est mourir à ce qu'on aime,*'" she sang softly, her voice like a vibration in the air.

"'*Et l'on part, et c'est un jeu—C'est son âme que l'on sème, que l'on sème à chaque adieu.*'"

Allen repeated the words. " '*C'est son âme que l'on sème.*' It was a rearing, a sowing of one's soul along the way. Do you remember, Girl, the wild excitement of it, and the eagerness, and the sinking feeling, and half fear? "

" I had no excitement, and no eagerness."

" It was like a weight under which one could hardly breathe."

" I remember the evening. It was like this, as still and lonely, but the sky was yellow, not red, and the harbor water shone between the tree trunks, golden. And the long leaves were on the willows. They made a tinkling sound and a sort of tremble in the darkness. And we stayed till the moon came up over the hill top ——"

" There she comes! "

" —and her light mingled with the sunset and made it dazzle, like fairyland. It was like so many other nights too, only different because it was the last."

" Or we thought it might be."

" Do you remember? I was nearly crying, I was so frightened. I was sure you would never come back, but you said you would."

" And I have."

" Have you? You said life was like a spring within you, you could feel it leap and bubble, an unending force. And nothing could stop it, and nothing could dam it till you came back."

" And finally it was the damming which brought me back."

" And you laughed at me for being afraid. And we

sat silent and drifted, till a voice from the shore called us ——”

“Allen!”

Adelaide gave a half-choked cry. “Oh, that startled me, it was so like!”

“Who’s calling me?”

“Dr. Bell.”

“Hello! Dr. Bell!”

“Didn’t you recognize the voice? It was he that time. That’s why it startled me.”

“No, I didn’t remember him. He didn’t count for ——” Allen interrupted himself. “I suppose we’d better go ashore and see him, Adelaide. I wonder how he heard I was here.”

Adelaide dipped her paddle in the water.

“Is this the first time you’ve been out to Spring Harbor since you got home?”

“Yes. Well, Dr. Bell! I am glad to see you.”

The boat touched the shore. Allen jumped out and gave Adelaide his hand.

Dr. Bell slapped him on the back. “Welcome home, my boy. And Miss Adelaide ——! Well, well, it’s like old times. And old times are a comfort to old hearts.”

“We were just talking of them out there.”

“You shouldn’t have been then. You should have been talking of new times—times that are coming.”

“When we don’t know what they’ll be!” said Adelaide, with a laugh. “Give me those fish, Allen, and I’ll take them in to Mary.”

"And tell her Dr. Bell is going to stay to dinner. You will, won't you?"

"Trout from the pond? I'll certainly stay."

"She'll be delighted," said Adelaide.

But she didn't seem to be, particularly. "Now what made Allen ask him!" she exclaimed. "I hate that man, with his slobbery sentimentality! The old humbug! Now we'll have to listen to all the misfortunes and misdoings of the neighborhood. And tomorrow they'll hear ours. And we might as well own up to them, because he'll make them up if we don't. Gossip's his stock in trade."

"It's probably the best medicine he's got for most of his patients. Nobody sends for him if it's anything more serious."

"I don't. I think he's a terror. And the way he goes round on tiptoe when you're sick is enough to kill anybody."

"I remember when we were kids and ate too much he never seemed of any material assistance toward getting better. Remember when he interdicted ice-cream for one whole summer? Are you sure that's not what still rankles?"

"It might be," admitted Mary. "But I think even then what rankled most was his going and telling the Camack children, so it got all over the village that the Carmichaels were little pigs, and had made themselves so sick they weren't to have anything good all summer. He was gossiping even then."

"What will he find to say about us this time, I wonder," said Adelaide.

Mary shrugged her shoulders. "He'll find something, you may be sure."

When she had Allen by himself, she told him what it would be. "You might as well have announced your engagement in the Long Islander," she said. "Everybody within a hundred miles will hear of it before three days have passed."

"How can they hear of it when it doesn't exist?"

"Give him three days and it will as good as exist."

"Well, what can I do about it?"

"You needn't have asked him to dinner."

"We had to have somebody."

"What for? Weren't we three a perfectly good party?"

"No, we were not! What in the world did you ask her down here for?"

"Because I've told you, Allen Carmichael, I'm not going to give up a lifelong friendship just because you—besides you didn't need to come if you didn't want to. It's the first time you have all the spring."

"I told you I didn't know she was coming!"

"'You forgot!' That's easy! Why did you stay out on the pond so long?"

"She was paddling. I couldn't very well ask her to land me, could I? As a matter of fact I did, finally."

"And I suppose you weren't having a good time a bit!"

But Allen was too truthful to deny it.

"Yes, I was. Oh, the dickens!"

Mary greeted her guest with well-feigned cordiality.

"This is very nice. How did you find us out so soon?"

"I was called to see old Mrs. Wise in the village. Her daughter told me that while she was sitting in the window of her mother's room she saw Allen drive by, and then you and another young lady, so I thought I would come and bid Allen welcome home,—and the other young lady."

He got up and made a low bow to Adelaide, who was coming into the room.

"I hope old Mrs. Wise isn't very sick," said Mary.

Dr. Bell let himself into his chair again, climbing painfully down his own knee. "Just the same old trouble. It will be a relief to her daughter when she has gone."

"It never struck me she felt that way about it," said Mary, a little tartly.

"No, no. A very devoted daughter. But still ——"

Mary jumped up. "Let's go to dinner," she said.

"And eat the fish," said Dr. Bell. "I declare had I known who 'the other young lady' was, I should never have thought of preventing your catching more."

"We didn't want to catch any more," said Adelaide. "We caught eight. Two apiece is more than we can possibly eat."

But when the dish appeared only six were on it.

"Where are the other two?" inquired Mary.

"Miss Mary, how can you ask such a tactless question? Those are precious fish. They have gone to the taxidermist."

"We didn't catch any worth stuffing," said Allen,

glaring at his sister across the table as though she were responsible for their guest's presence.

Dr. Bell felt very genial. "It's very pleasant, my lad, to find that you are able to be about like this, motoring and fishing. We heard you were an invalid."

"I? No. I was invalided home, but that doesn't mean I'm an invalid by a long shot."

"I'm glad to hear that," exclaimed Dr. Bell, heartily. "Those diseases contracted in the tropics usually ruin a man's life. Not that it would matter so much to you who don't have to work for your living."

The old taunt irritated Allen. "I guess I work as hard as you do," he said, "always have for the matter of that."

"But there's some difference, my lad, as I hope you may never learn, between working for pleasure and working for your living."

"Don't see why, unless you're lazy and want to sit and twiddle your thumbs. If you're energetic and like your work I can't for the life of me see where the difference comes in."

"The difference comes in right there, my lad. You don't like work you have to do whether you like it or not. Now I get no pleasure whatever out of visiting old Mrs. Wise, whereas Miss Mary apparently does."

"Well, then, you've had the misfortune of having the wrong work to do. I assure you in our office lots of men like it as much as I do."

Dr. Bell pricked up his ears. "Do you mean to say you have really gone to work, Allen?"

"Yes."

"What are you doing?"

"Engineering, of course."

"In whose office?"

"Mr. Alden's."

"Oh, ho!"

Allen was busy carving and he did not look up. He felt, rather than saw, Adelaide's face flush, and Mary's mouth stiffen. "The deuce!" he muttered under his breath.

"I wonder," said Adelaide after their guest had gone, "whether he considers this a profitable visit. Do you think he collected a good stock of gossip?"

"Excellent," answered Mary.

Again Allen said "The deuce!"

* * * * *

After the stillness of the night the rumble of a wagon on the bridge woke Adelaide in the early morning. The driver had a reed flute and, Pan like, was piping a refrain over and over, interrupting himself now and then to sing a stanza in a soft Italian tenor. She went to her window to look at him.

The dawn lingered in the haze over the harbor long after the sun had risen. The pond lay still, as though not yet awake. A swan floated on its surface, gazing pensively at its own reflection.

The house was very quiet, taking its Sunday morning ease. But Adelaide was not sleepy, though she had not slept well. She wished she had not come to Spring Harbor. She felt angry and sad. Lately there seemed to have been a new force rising in her,

opening doors to new thoughts and feelings, which frightened her. They came unbidden and were uncontrolled. Her will had taken up arms against them but they were strong and throbbing, and threatened to drive her out of her safe accustomed ways. To do what? She was afraid to wonder. Yesterday they had made her stay on the pond with Allen and say things to him which this morning her face burned to think of. She turned away from the window with a little shiver.

Somewhere in the house a door slammed, and then there were footsteps on the gravel. She looked out again. Allen was on the avenue, walking toward the garage with his suitcase in his hand. Adelaide stood motionless watching while his car came chugging by the house, the cylinders firing unevenly in the frosty morning, turned out of the gate and disappeared around the bend in the road beyond the village. Then she gave a little moan, like a hurt child, and dropped on her knees. Her head on her hands on the sill of the window, she sobbed as though her heart would break.

CHAPTER XXV

GREAT-AUNT JANE MAKES AN UNEXPECTED VISIT

"MOLLY! Oh, Moll!" There was a clatter and squeak on the creaky old stairs and the door of the little attic studio flew open. Young Jane came through it like a whirlwind, bumping her head against the low lintel.

"Bless that door! I never can remember it! You ought to put a sign on it. My word, what a mess!"

Molly was in the midst of unpacking her Lares and Penates, newly arrived from New York. She herself had been home ten days.

"Why didn't you tell me you were going to get them out? I'd have come and helped you."

"I didn't know I was. I didn't really mean to. I came up to see whether old Jim had put them where I told him, and I found he had taken the nails out of the covers so I peeked inside one box and then another, and went on and on. Look, Janey, Uncle Joe liked this ever so much, those loose half transparent onion skins. You have no idea, Janey, what an awfully hard thing a nice peely onion is to paint."

She spread her pictures out on the floor, kneeling in the midst of them.

"I wish I could have brought my 'chef-d'œuvre' down to show you. But I do think even these show heaps of improvement, don't you?"

"Oh, yes. But see here, we can't stay and look at them now. I came up to tell you Aunt Jane is downstairs."

"Aunt Jane!"

"Yes. She came out on the train with William. And she says she's going to stay a week."

"Good land! Whatever brought her? She's never done anything like that before. Why, it's always taken Grandfather a month's hard work to move her at all."

"William says he doesn't know what made her come, he knows he didn't. He thinks she's got it into her head there's something wrong with you. He says she asked how you were, and he said you were all right, except that you were rather soft after a winter in the city, and you were stiff from riding, and Rob Roy had pulled so your hands were all blistered, not to speak of your nose. And she said it was unnecessary for a gentleman to go into the details of a lady's condition; that it was quite possible to answer her question without doing so. And what she wished to know was in what sort of spirits you were. And he said in the sort of spirits a person might be expected to be who couldn't stand up and couldn't sit down and couldn't touch anything. And she said he would please remember that if he chose to be coarse, he would have to frequent coarse society, and were you painting. And he answered you were not, and didn't dare say anything more. And she said then send Charity to her as she was coming out with him for a visit of at least a week. And here she is."

"Well! I'm afraid she may find a week a long

time. She's never stayed that long before. She's always sort of mad at things before that. Now, Jane, we'll have to fix up the spare room. You go down and entertain her while I see about it."

"No! Look here! I'm keeping house now. You can't play fast and loose like that. You can't drop it when you please and take it up again just whenever you feel like it. You go and entertain her. It's up to me to fix the room."

"Yes, but Janey, I don't want to interfere in the least with your housekeeping, but one of my trunks is there, you know."

"No, William has just gone to move it out. Besides she wants to talk to you."

"I don't see why she should. She's already talked to me one whole morning."

"She wants to talk to you one whole week! Look here, I wish you'd tell me what it was that really did make you come home so soon. I don't think it's a bit nice of you not to. We always have told each other everything."

"But, Janey, there isn't anything to tell. Honestly there isn't. I just got too tired."

"Too tired! Pooh! I believe you fell in love with that Carmichael man you were always writing about. You didn't make some kind of a fool of yourself about it, did you? Go and tell him, or ——"

"Jane!"

"Well, Aunt Jane will find out all right before a week's out. If you'd rather have her know than me!"

"Jane, you're an idiot! Go and attend to that room

if you're going to. She's sure to be tired and want to lie down."

Aunt Jane was in the Yellow Room, glaring at the spots on the wall where "Governor Robert and Jane, his wife," had erstwhile hung. She kissed Molly on both cheeks, resting her hand on her shoulders.

"It seems to me, Molly," she said, "that you could not spend your time better than painting a pair of pictures to hang over those spots."

"I've been thinking of that," said Molly. "I've only just unpacked my things, in fact I'm in the middle of doing it. I don't think I have anything that would look well there."

"Your picture of Adelaide Alden you left in the North, I understand."

"Yes. I'm going to exhibit it, and if I have luck I may be able to sell it."

Aunt Jane's brows contracted slightly. "Personally, I do not like this new-fangled notion of ladies taking money for their work. To my mind it is more dignified for them to stay at home and save what they have. However, that is your grandfather's affair, not mine. And I suppose there are cases when it cannot be avoided." She was glaring at the deal table which had taken the place of the mahogany one of her childhood. "There is a vulgar old saying that 'needs must when the devil drives.' I presume you have Miss Alden's permission to sell her likeness?"

"What's that?" Molly looked up, startled.

"Have you asked her whether she has any objection?"

"Why—I—no, I haven't. I never once thought of it."

Aunt Jane raised her eyebrows. "Will you get me a stool for my feet, if you please, child."

"Is that right, Aunt Jane?"

"Quite right, I thank you."

"Do you think I should, Aunt Jane?"

"I am surprised that you have not already done so."

"But Uncle Joe never suggested that I should."

"Instinct should be a sufficient guide in such matters."

"But, Aunt Jane, it seems so foolish, when I know she wouldn't mind."

"How do you know?"

"Why because, she would have said so. She knows I'm going to show it, at least I'm quite sure she must, and she wrote me a letter congratulating me on what the artists had said to Uncle Joe about it."

"Have you answered her letter?"

"No, not yet. I only got it a day or two ago."

"Then, my child, you have the opportunity open to you to do the gracious thing. She has done it."

"But, Aunt Jane, I do so hate to ask favors."

Aunt Jane tapped the toe of her foot impatiently with the tip of her stick. "It would seem to me even more objectionable to accept them without asking. But I confess, I do not understand the moderns. I hope my sudden decision to visit you has not disturbed any of your arrangements, Molly."

"Oh, no indeed, Aunt Jane. Besides I haven't any arrangements. Jane has been running the house, you

know, and she has just been warning me that I must keep hands off."

"It is a very good thing. It is good training. I have always considered you an excellent housekeeper, but Jane has been more difficult to teach. She has not seemed to have a taste for it. I am glad to hear that she is reluctant to give up the reins to you again. It will also leave you freer to pursue your own work, which, since you have put your hand to the plow, you should do with your whole heart. I understand from William that you are still resting."

"Yes, but I was planning to begin to work again soon. I'm just unpacking my things, and I thought then I would begin to paint right away, perhaps this afternoon."

A suppressed chuckle, too low for Aunt Jane's ears, made Molly turn her head. Young Jane was in the doorway.

"Your room's ready, Aunt Jane," she said. "Mom Clio and I have fixed it all up."

The old lady got to her feet with difficulty, leaning on Molly's arm and on her stick.

"Then I will go up-stairs," she said. "No, thank you, my dears, I shall not need your attendance. Clio can do all I wish. She belonged to me before the war, you remember, and I trained her myself to my own ways. Shall I see your grandfather at dinner?"

"Oh, yes, he'll be home. He and Robert have gone across the river to that wood lot to see about chopping."

"And we dine?"

"At three."

Molly went up to the old lady as she stood at the foot of the stairs leaning on Mom Clio's arm. She leaned over and kissed her.

"It's sweet of you to come, Auntie dear. But honestly, there was no need."

Aunt Jane began her slow ascent. "Probably not," she said. "But I have never considered that one should drop an undertaking till it was complete. It seems strange that a woman like myself, who has assumed no family responsibilities, should have had the care and upbringing of two generations of children. However, three generations ago I was young myself, and I still remember that I considered no act as becoming to my great-aunt as that of going up-stairs to her room."

Molly objected. "There are great-aunts and great-aunts."

The old lady was at the landing. She paused to look down at them. "Very true," she admitted. "But I have the impression that all great-nieces are alike."

She vanished up the second half of the stairs, and her cracked old laugh drifted down to them from the floor above.

"You ought to be more careful, Janey. I bet she heard you snicker when I said I was going to begin to paint this afternoon."

"She's as deaf as a mule. She couldn't have heard me."

"Then she saw you."

"I don't believe she did. It was just a lucky guess. Unless she really does remember, and she's never shown any sign of that before. I wonder what she's come for, anyway."

"I thought you had decided it was on my account. And I guess it was, too. You know, Janey, I think it was rather sweet of her to dig herself up by the roots like that, because she thought I needed her. Of course I don't need her, but then she thought I did, so that doesn't make any difference."

"It seems to me it makes a good deal of difference," said Jane. "It makes the difference, for one thing, that you and I have got to cook lunch."

Molly laughed. "Not much, it doesn't! You're keeping house! Do you know what happened the other day? I broke one of her ivory knitting needles, and she never said a word."

"Well, the only explanation I can see is that she's going out of her head. Come on out to the kitchen and help me, Moll. Don't be mean!"

CHAPTER XXVI

YOUNG JANE GOES A-GUESSING

MOM CLIO had replaced the mop cap with an old silk bandanna in honor of Missy Jane. She served with an unwonted deftness, hurrying her creaky feet almost to lightness under the daunting, beloved eyes of her old mistress. Aunt Jane watched her with disapprobation, noting the patch at her shoulder and the lack of one at her heel. She spoke to her as she passed a dish, tapping the silver mug in the centre of the table.

"That should be brighter, Clio. See to it."

"Yas'm."

Aunt Jane turned to young Jane as the old woman left the room.

"Molly tells me you do the housekeeping. I fear you are too lax. You must drive the negroes with a tight rein."

"But the trouble is," said William, "that you can't drive them at all, nowadays. You've got to coax them along. Have some more rice, Janey?"

Aunt Jane raised her eyebrows. "Human nature does not change," she said. "Clio, I venture to think, is the same woman she ever was——"

Young Jane shook her head at William. "No, thanks," she said aside to him.

Aunt Jane heard her and interrupted her sentence. "What was that you said, Jane?"

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"I said,—oh, I meant to say 'No, I thank you, William.'"

"Your cup, my dear."

Jane was sipping her tea from her spoon. She put it down hastily and raised her cup.

"—and she should be handled in precisely the same way as she always was. Do you not agree with me, Robert?" she turned to her brother, beside whom she was sitting.

He was staring straight in front of him down the table. It took him a minute to rouse himself. "I beg your pardon, Jane. I was not attending. You say the negro nature is the same as it was before the war, and should be handled in the same way? Unfortunately, as William says, it cannot be handled in the same way, and, perhaps for this reason, it does not appear in the same light. To-day Robert and I were across the river at the pine wood by Wild Duck Creek, seeing what timber could be advantageously cut. We found someone had been before us, all the white pine gone, nothing but the lob lollies left. Such an exhibition of dishonesty would have been impossible in the old days, therefore whether the dishonesty existed there is no means of telling."

Young Robert was playing with his food, hardly touching it. "It means the loss of a couple of thousand dollars to us," he said. "I don't know how we shall meet it. We shall have to let the repairs on the house go over again this year. Do you think the ceiling will hold another year, sir?"

His grandfather tapped the table with his finger tips.

"We will discuss that at another time," he said. He turned toward his sister. "This is a very pleasant surprise you have given us, Jane. I have not yet gotten over it. It makes me feel quite young again to have you sitting beside me. It brings back the old days."

"The old days had already come back to me," she answered. "That's why I came. If you have leisure this afternoon, Robert, I should like to talk to you. We will excuse you, children."

She led the way into the Yellow Room. Her brother followed her, closing the door behind him. The four young Alloways looked at each other.

"What do you suppose is the trouble now?" asked Robert. "What does she want to talk about?"

"Why Molly, of course," answered Jane. "She's the whole excitement nowadays."

"You might tell us what it's all about, Moll," said William.

"But it isn't about anything," insisted Molly. "The only excitement I know anything about is whether my picture will be a success or not. And I've certainly told you about that often enough."

"Yes, but why did you come home?"

"That was just Uncle Joe's old fussiness. He thought I was tired. And I was, too. Just you go up there and live in a whirl for five months, doing more in one day than you've ever done in a week before, and see if you don't get tired."

"If she'd own up and tell me about it, why of course I wouldn't repeat, but as she doesn't choose to

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do that, I've got as good a right to guess as anybody else. I believe she fell in love with that Carmichael man!" Jane looked angry.

Molly turned on her. "Jane, you're a perfect idiot! Do you suppose I'd go and fall in love with a man who's engaged to somebody else?"

"Is he engaged? Who to?"

"Adelaide Alden."

"You never told me that!"

"No. I don't go around talking about other people's business when they don't want it mentioned. None of you must speak of it till it's announced, not to anybody. See?"

Robert knocked his ashes from his pipe. "Guess there won't be much temptation. I suppose we'll hear, all in good time, what Aunt Jane is after. As long as it isn't money! Come and sound the ceiling with me, William."

Jane was resting her elbows on the table, her chin in her hands. She was staring immovably at Molly.

"Why didn't you tell me that long ago?" she asked. "I thought you were writing everything."

"I was," answered Molly. "As a matter of fact I didn't know it myself till a little while ago."

"Just happened?"

"No. Long standing, years and years. But they don't talk about it. Uncle Joe told me. Now listen, to come back to practical matters, how are we to manage while Aunt Jane is here? Hannah has a baby and there isn't another woman on the place who is fit to bring into the house to help us."

"We'll simply have to do the cooking ourselves, that's all. Mom Clio will be too busy dancing attendance on Aunt Jane."

"And cleaning the silver—I'm delighted about that, anyhow. Come along, we'd better get started."

CHAPTER XXVII

GREAT-AUNT JANE EXPLAINS HER COMING

IN the Yellow Room Great-aunt Jane was talking to her brother.

"How does Molly seem to you since she has been home?" she asked.

"She seems to me very well. It is a pleasure to have her back."

"That's not what I asked. You know I never approved of her going."

"Nor did I, fully. But now I have to confess it was a wise step."

Aunt Jane grunted. "I have always been firm in my opinions, myself." She let a pause follow the statement before going on. "I am getting old, brother," she announced, "I am old, too old."

"Indeed, sister! I am surprised. Ever since I was little more than a boy, I have dreaded becoming too old, yet that unfortunate time has always receded as I advanced, and I have never yet reached it. I do not mean by that, that I do not miss times that have passed, but never yet have I come to the time when I, personally, would have cared to be a year younger. Even after our bodies begin to go down hill there is a continued growth of mind, of soul, of whatever you choose to call it, that compensates."

"I am not talking philosophy, Robert. I'm in earnest. I should not have been a great-aunt all these years."

"You shouldn't, Jane? I don't see how you could very well help it."

"I speak metaphorically, of course, Robert. I should have continued in spirit a great-niece. I had a great-aunt myself, and I should have profited by the experience. If you don't profit by your own experience how do you expect to enable others to profit by it?"

"I presume you are talking about the children. You certainly have no reason to trouble yourself on their account. They are a real credit to your training. I am very proud of them."

"I am not. At least, yes, I am. But I am not proud of myself in connection with them. What, in your opinion, is the function of education, brother?"

"The ultimate function? It is hard to define, Jane. I should say—I think I should say—to point the way."

"Precisely. There has been an unusual stir in the harbor at Charleston lately. Sitting in my window, I have seen two strange boats come in. I have watched the pilots board them and guide them, and as my custom is, I have tried to draw wisdom from what I have seen."

"That is an excellent habit, Jane."

"We will say then, if you please, that the pupil is the ship, the teacher the pilot. It is his duty to guide her over waters that he is supposed to know. He does it by boarding the ship and going right into her

pilot house, which for purposes of comparison we will call the pupil's mind. Now it is obvious that a great-aunt must find it exceedingly difficult to enter the mind of her great-nieces unless she succeeds in remaining, in spirit at least, a great-niece herself. Is it not so?"

"Perhaps, Jane."

"I remember to have said to the children, not once but a hundred times, 'I do not understand you.' I even remember their saying to me that I did not understand them, and I remember I was very angry with them. I cannot now imagine a more terrible arraignment which a child could make."

"I think you trouble yourself unnecessarily, Jane."

"I am worried about Molly. If I felt I had her confidence more fully, I should be better satisfied. I do not want her to live the life I have led."

Mr. Alloway looked very perplexed. "I fear I do not quite comprehend your meaning, my dear sister. I do not see how, supposing the circumstances to have been the same, she could have lived a better life than yours. You have had every necessity and comfort, even if you have had to dispense with the luxuries. She might have married, of course, which you, apparently, have never cared to do. But with this great talent of hers, which seems to be an undoubted fact, I do not see how she can possibly live your life, or one remotely resembling it. It seems doubtful if she will even live in the same place as you have lived. It seems more probable that she will make her home in the North."

"I am speaking of the life of the spirit, Robert." Aunt Jane had her stick across the arms of her chair and was twirling it vigorously.

Mr. Alloway shook his head. "I am sorry, my dear Jane, but I honestly do not understand what you are talking about."

"Well, never mind. I remember you always found it singularly difficult to understand anything connected with the life of the spirit. I do not think it advisable that I should explain more fully. After all, this is my affair, not yours. I felt that I should give you some explanation for this unusual visitation, but it is sufficient that you should know that I have come on Molly's account and that I shall stay as long as I think I may be of use to her."

She rose with the aid of her stick, and went toward the door. Her brother stepped forward to open it for her. He paused with his hand on the knob.

"You disturb me, Jane. I have noticed nothing wrong with Molly."

"You wouldn't, my dear Robert. Now I will not keep you any longer. You understand it is not you whom I have come to see, but my nieces."

The two girls were coming into the house through the door at the back of the hall, under the stairs.

"Ah, here you are, my dears. I was hoping I should find you. Having come to the country, I suppose it is my duty to taste its pleasures. If you will be kind enough to bring up that terrible little machine in which William brought me from the station, I will go for a drive with you."

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Jane looked at her aunt with her mouth open. Molly answered.

"I'm afraid we can't, Aunt Jane, we've got to get supper. But I'm sure William would love to go with you. He's right out here. I'll call him."

Great-aunt Jane stopped her. "You will do nothing of the sort, my dear. I have not come out here to gad about the country with William. I shall come with you to the kitchen. When I was a girl, I was considered an excellent cook. That, of course, was before the war, when it was possible to get all the ingredients we required. Now it is out of the question to make anything worth eating."

Her nieces followed her in silence, wondering greatly.

CHAPTER XXVIII

GREAT-AUNT JANE INSPECTS THE MAIL

MOLLY was painting again. The taste for it returned after a short rest, as Mr. Oliphant had predicted it would. She spent long hours of every day up in the little studio under the roof. No one had been up there to see what she was painting, and all that she said was that she was doing two pictures to cover up the spots on the wall of the Yellow Room "out of her head." No one had much curiosity about it except Great-aunt Jane, who sighed at the thought of the height of rickety stairs which cut off the studio from the rest of the house. To the others it was the most natural thing in the world that Molly should disappear up there and come down again half a day later, dreamy-eyed and tired. It was just as it had always been except that before it had been only stolen hours she could spend there, whereas now the hours stolen were those outside the studio. Jane was more than busy with the housekeeping. Aunt Jane's presence made it a good deal of a drive, and although she knew painting was Molly's business now, in her heart of hearts she felt as though her sister was loafing and shirking, and she did not climb to the attic and sit cross-legged on the top of the old low-boy, which was the only possible seat when Molly was occupying the chair, as she would have done otherwise.

This morning she was out in the yard behind the back kitchen, superintending the boiling of the clothes by Mom Clio, in the old primitive fashion of hanging the pot over a fire built on the ground. Mom Clio could have done it just as well by herself, if she would have, and it irritated Jane to have to watch her. More especially because she knew Aunt Jane, in the dining-room window, was watching also, and making criticisms which might quite likely not remain inward. That was the greatest irritation of all. Aunt Jane persisted in still treating her like a child to be corrected, whereas her manner to Molly had changed. Molly could do what she pleased and say what she pleased without fear of reproof, now; the grown-ups treated her on an equality, like one of themselves. Before this she and Jane had stood shoulder to shoulder in an offensive and defensive alliance against the whole genus comprised in the broadly comprehensive term "they," and now Molly had gone over to "them," and left Jane to wage the battles of childhood alone. She looked upon the growing intimacy between Molly and Aunt Jane as almost an affront on herself. Jealousy was at the bottom of her irritation, though she did not realize it any more than she realized that it was not Molly's fault that having stepped out of childhood herself she should find a surer understanding in her aunt than she did in her young sister.

Jane kept her back carefully turned toward the house so she could pretend she didn't know Aunt Jane was watching her, and whistled aloud out of sheer bravado, to prove she didn't care in the least how often

Aunt Jane told her that "whistling girls and crowing hens never came to any good end." The simile was insulting, and hens never came to any good end anyhow, they got their necks wrung.

The sound of a horse loping along the soft road made her stop in the middle of a tune and look across the yard. Old Ben was riding up to the gate. A little piccaninny opened at his call, and he cantered over to her, stopping his horse with a shout, "Whoa, there, you!" and raising a cloud of dust. He held the bag out toward her with a white-toothed smile, but Jane was on her dignity and refused to come and get it like an eager child.

"Bring it here, Ben," she ordered. And Ben brought it, with a complete understanding of the situation. It was not the first time he had watched pinfeathers sprout.

"Little Missy gettin' big." He grinned with the familiarity born of many pig-a-back rides, and the fact that his father and grandfather and great-grandfather had all been "Massa's" own body-servants in their day.

"Of course," said Jane, snubbing him. She sat down on the horse-block and began to unfasten the bag.

Aunt Jane opened the window. "Jane, do you usually open that bag?"

"Grandfather usually does, but he's not here."

"Are you allowed to open it, then? Come here. Don't stand there shouting at me."

Jane came reluctantly. "Why shouldn't I open it? I want to see if there are any letters for me."

"Bring it into the house then, so the letters don't blow away."

She came, but stayed in the hall outside the dining-room door, spreading the letters out on the table in little heaps according to their addresses. There were none for her, there never were. Aunt Jane came tapping out to her on her stick.

"Well, did you get any?"

It was a new grievance to have to say "No," so she hurried over the statement as though it were of no importance. "There's one for Molly. Look what a big fat one from New York. It's in a man's handwriting. I bet it's from Allen Carmichael. And here's one from Mr. Oliphant for Grandfather. I know his handwriting. I wonder whether it's to say he wants to come down here."

"You should not speculate on the contents of other people's letters, Jane. It is, in a minor degree, like reading them, which, of course, you would never think of doing under any circumstance, without their permission."

"Of course not," said Jane, who was in the habit of reading all Molly's letters without the least ceremony.

"Take it up to your sister."

Jane rebelled. "I'm too busy. I can't sit down and do nothing as she does all day. I've got my work to attend to. If she wants it she can come and get it. She can see the yard from the window, and she will have seen ——"

"She's for a cat and he's for a dog," interrupted

Aunt Jane. "Give me the letter. I'll take it up. It may be important. And Molly's strength must be saved for her work. You know she came home in need of rest."

Jane was dismayed. She had never thought of Aunt Jane doing anything so desperate as trying to climb those stairs to the studio. Her bubble of dignity was pricked.

"Oh, no, Aunt Jane! Please don't. I'll take it. Please!"

The old lady had already started. "I won't disturb you," she said, shortly. "I am quite capable of doing it myself, since you are too busy."

"Please, Aunt Jane! You'll hurt yourself!" Jane was really distressed. She was on the verge of tears.

Aunt Jane looked at her severely. "Go down-stairs to your work," she ordered, leaning against the banister and pointing her stick at her niece. She gave a little chuckle as the child disappeared through the doorway without uttering another word.

"Do her good," she said to herself.

But it was not wholly as a means of punishment for Jane that she had made up her mind to deliver the letter to Molly herself. It had occurred to her that if it was from Allen Carmichael she would like to watch Molly when she read it.

CHAPTER XXIX

ALLEN PLAYS FIRST

THE old stairs complained aloud. The slightest pressure made each step cry out as though it were being torn asunder. No one could possibly take Molly unawares in her aerie. She put down her palette and turned to listen with a sudden thump in her head and flushing cheeks. She had seen Ben ride into the yard, as Jane had said she must, and had been tempted to go down to see if he had brought her a letter. But careful calculation, "Monday morning, Monday night, Tuesday night, Wednesday," had shown her that this was the earliest possible moment when she could get an answer to her letter to Adelaide, and it was not to be expected that Adelaide would have sat down and written at once. So there would be no letter of importance and it was foolish to go down as though she was impatient about it. She did not want to show Aunt Jane that she was impatient. She had taken the stand that there was no favor whatever involved in Adelaide allowing her to show her picture, and that it was merely a piece of exaggerated courtesy to ask her permission. But to put a thing in writing gives it actuality, even if it had none before, and now that her letter had gone she began to feel as though in reality she had asked a favor, and to wonder whether it would

be granted. She still denied even to herself that it was so, but though she refused to do the feeling the compliment of going down-stairs to look for a letter, it was there just the same, and she felt a sudden rush of excitement when she heard the old stairs creaking.

Jane was coming very slowly. Why did she stop like that? Molly never doubted it must be Jane till she heard the clatter of a stick falling. She exclaimed aloud:

“My gracious goodness!”

She sprang to the door with a very different feeling from what she would have had a fortnight ago. More and more she had come to realize that Aunt Jane was being “rather sweet” to her and to appreciate what a sacrifice the old lady was making on her behalf by staying away from her own home so long. Gradually their relation was changing and Molly’s confidence was expanding like a flower. Before, real things, things deep down, were things to keep sacred from Aunt Jane’s scoffing tongue, now they were coming to the surface. And though she did not welcome her approach with all the eagerness which young Jane in her soreness imagined her doing, neither did she dread it. She thought Aunt Jane was being “rather sweet” again, if rather an interruption as well.

The stairs were very steep, with high narrow treads. The roof sloped down over them so you had to lean over to avoid bumping your head. Even young people went up them carefully. Aunt Jane was frankly stuck half-way. She was standing sideways because the treads were not wide enough to plant her feet on **them**

firmly straight ahead, and she had hold of the banisters with both hands. She was panting; she had dropped her stick which had slipped all the way down to the bottom of the stairs again.

"Oh, Aunt Jane!" Molly ran down and caught hold of her arm. "Aunt Jane, you ought not to have tried it! You know you oughtn't!"

"Yes, I ought. I've got a letter for you, which I think is probably from Adelaide Alden in answer to yours." In Aunt Jane's code that sort of fib didn't count.

"But why didn't you send Janey? You shouldn't have come yourself!"

"Jane said she was too busy, couldn't spare the time from her housekeeping. So I said I wasn't busy."

"She didn't! You ought to have spanked her!"

"This will be much more efficacious, my dear." Neither was putting the whole burden of blame on Jane one of the things which counted according to Aunt Jane's code. "I wish I could sit down. But you might as well try to sit on the side of a house. I'd forgotten what terrible stairs they are. It must be fifty years since I've been up them."

"If I get in front of you, you can lean on my shoulder and get down without much difficulty, I think. Jane ought to be ashamed of herself!"

"But my dear child, I'm not ready to go down. I'm not up yet."

"You don't mean to say you're going any further?"

"You don't suppose I've come all this way without going to the top? I don't ever expect to be as near to

your studio again and I'm certainly going to see it now I'm here."

"But, Aunt ——"

"There's no but about it. Run down and get my stick. Can you get by me? Old Dan used to call these 'de bery shell ob stars' because we wouldn't let him leave off the s. And I can't say there's much when you get to the top either," said Aunt Jane as she reached the top step. "You'll certainly have to find a better place than this to work in, my dear, if you're ever going to do anything worth while. Here's your letter."

Molly glanced at it. "It isn't from Adelaide," she said, putting it down on the edge of the easel. "It isn't in her handwriting." It occurred to her that Aunt Jane couldn't very well have thought it was in any girl's handwriting. But then she didn't see clearly without her glasses.

"Dear me, isn't it?" said Aunt Jane. "That's very disappointing. However, it's rather early to expect it, I suppose. Now let me see what you are doing, my dear. Is this for the Yellow Room? Turn it around so I can see it."

Molly turned the easel. "You won't get much light, I'm afraid, if I do. That's the trouble with this place. You can't get light and distance at the same time. There! I guess that's about as good as it can be."

It was a view of a mountain-bordered lake. On one side the cliffs rose sheer and high from the very water's edge, black in the shadow of the mountain be-

hind them, and themselves throwing black shadows across the lake at their feet. Back of them a storm-cloud was gathering, dark and heavy, white tips gleaming where the sunlight flashed on them. On the other side of the lake the hills sloped gently back from the shore, the sunlight, not yet cut off by the gathering cloud, shining on peaceful pastures and well-cultivated fields right up to their summits.

"Well, well," said Aunt Jane. "That is very striking. I must say I had no idea, for all they said about your genius, that you could do anything like that. Where did you ever see anything like it, my dear? There is nothing the least resembles it between here and New York. I know that."

"I never did see it," said Molly. "I just got it out of my head."

"Good gracious!" exclaimed Aunt Jane. "Have you got things like that in your head? How queer they must feel. What put it in your head?"

Molly laughed. "I don't know. Of course I've seen lots of pictures of mountains and lakes and things, up in the North. And I suppose just because I never had seen them, they stirred my imagination more, I think, than almost anything else. And I kept wondering and wondering what a mountain lake with a rising storm would look like until all of a sudden I saw it just as plain as day. And then I painted it. That's the easiest part, of course. The seeing is what counts."

"Then why can't we all paint? We can all see you know, my dear, even the negroes."

"But that's not the sort of seeing. Just like this

thing. It doesn't matter whether you have actually seen it with your eyes if you've seen it with—something that lives inside of you."

"I never could understand artist talk," said Aunt Jane, dismissing the subject. "Though I was considered to sketch very well myself, before the war. That's for one spot. What are you going to make for the other?"

"I'm planning another mountain scene. Right on the edge of the sea. After a storm, with the water still white and lashing but the sky and the hills at rest."

"And have you seen this, too, with your inward something?"

Molly laughed, not quite liking the tone of sarcasm. "Yes, I think I have." She pushed her canvas back toward the window, so Aunt Jane couldn't see it any more. "I wish I had more things of interest to show you," she said. "But you have seen most of my best things."

"Never mind, my dear. What I came to see was what you were doing and where you were doing it. I must say I don't think much of the latter. The first money you make, though I can never alter my opinion of a lady's making any money unless forced by actual hunger, which you are not, and, please God, never will be. Still, the first money you do make you should spend to build yourself a proper place to work in."

"That will have to be the second money," said Molly. "The first is going on the ceiling and the roof, and it had better come quick."

Aunt Jane nodded. "The ceiling is certainly in a

deplorable condition. I noticed it on the way up here. I hope no accident occurs before it can be mended."

"I heard Robert and William discussing the possibility of mending it themselves. But they neither of them know anything about it and they seemed to be afraid they would make it worse instead of better."

"Quite right. No doubt they would. However, I am still of opinion that it is of the first importance that you should have a proper place to work. If you can do a thing like that in this little hole you can do a very great deal better somewhere else. Of that I have no doubt. Possibly if you win a prize with your picture at the Academy, which Mr. Oliphant seems so sure you will, you will have enough to do both. But we must not count our chickens before they're hatched. It depends entirely on what Miss Alden says. By the way, who is your letter from if it isn't from her?"

"I haven't opened it yet."

"Don't let me prevent you."

"I'm not in any hurry."

"I shall have to stay here some time and rest before I venture to climb down again. And I don't wish to talk any more. My breath is short. Read your letter, my dear."

"I'd rather show you things."

"As you remarked, I have seen all your good things once. And I am not a sufficient connoisseur to care to see them over again, or to see the poor ones at all. So leave me alone, my dear, and read your letter."

Molly opened it reluctantly, wondering when she would be able to hold her own against Aunt Jane, who

in spite of being "rather sweet," still twisted her around her little finger. She wondered, too, whether Aunt Jane really had thought the letter was from Adelaide. She understood Aunt Jane's code right down to the ground. After all it was her own code, too.

Aunt Jane had the only chair, and Molly was sitting on the floor in the embrasure of the window, where she usually sat to paint. The light from the window fell full on her face, and Aunt Jane saw quite clearly that she flushed when she opened the letter. The old lady nodded her head the least bit in the world.

"Well, Molly, who is it from?" she asked.

Molly was expecting the question; she knew there was no escaping from it.

"It's from Allen Carmichael," she answered.

"Oh. I suppose he is writing in place of Miss Alden, in answer to your letter. I hope it is not because Miss Alden is ill. What does he say about the picture?"

"Nothing, so far. I don't think he is writing about that."

"No? Then what is he writing about?"

"Why he's just writing."

"Indeed." Aunt Jane paused before continuing, so that Molly might get the full flavor of her tone of voice. "Of course I do not pretend to understand the manners of the moderns, but I do know that in my young days, before the war, it would not have been considered the proper thing for a lady to correspond with another lady's fiancé."

"I don't know that one letter makes a correspond-

ence," said Molly. "One swallow doesn't make a summer, they say." She knew it was an inane remark before she had completed it.

Aunt Jane raised her eyebrows.

"One letter may not constitute a correspondence," she said. "But it may well constitute an affront. In my young days, before the war, it would have been considered to come very near doing so, unless the gentleman had some very good excuse for writing it."

"That may have been so before the war, but I'm quite sure nowadays Allen Carmichael would never dream of its being an affront for him to write to me, and no one else would dream of considering it one either,—least of all Adelaide. That's not the sort of footing we've been on all winter."

"No? I confess I do not understand the footing of the moderns, any more than I understand anything else about them. I only know that in *my* young days, before the war, I should have been expected to show such a letter, if I had ever received one, which I find it hard to imagine, to my mother."

Molly was tempted to make the obvious answer, "I have no mother," but she checked herself. After all Aunt Jane *had* been rather sweet lately. And anyhow Molly knew her back was to the wall and it would be better to yield with a good grace now than with a bad one later, so she said, "Oh, if that's what you mean, I haven't the least objection to showing it to you. Have you got your glasses?"

"No. You will have to read it to me."

Molly was disgusted with herself, it took so much

more courage to begin than she would have liked it to. But her voice was quite steady, and none but the most sharply listening ears would have heard a quiver in it.

"Dear Miss Molly: I wonder if you have forgotten your promise? Here is the redemption of mine. I picture your home as a very lovely place. The house as I see it, is white and stately. It has something the feeling of a Greek temple (enshrining a goddess). The roof has only a gentle slope,—it needs no more, not being obliged to contend with snow. But the columns, which run up over two stories, are square; I know this because you have told me so, and this takes away from the Greek effect. The columns run right down in to the ground. I think they must stand on low pedestals of rough stone. They stand out a considerable distance from the side of the house and the space ——"

"What in the world is the man talking about?" exclaimed Aunt Jane. "It is the strangest letter I ever read."

"Oh, it's just a joke we had."

"But he begins by speaking of a promise?"

"Only a joking promise."

Aunt Jane raised her eyebrows again. "When I was young, before the war, a promise was not a joke—it was considered a sacred thing. I confess I do not understand the moderns." Aunt Jane was having difficulties of her own in becoming a great-niece again. Sometimes she forgot even to try.

Molly said nothing in reply. "Shall I go on?" she asked.

Aunt Jane nodded her head, a stately, disapproving nod.

"—the space behind them is what you call 'the bricks.' I fancy it a sort of loggia—brick-floored obviously—and comfortably furnished, without all the Turkey-red and stuff it would have up here, but with quaint, lovely chairs and rustic benches—all the colorings soft and restful. I think there is a horse-block at the edge of 'the bricks.' I can't imagine there not being a horse-block in front and behind and on either side of every properly appointed plantation house—and I think there is a plant standing on the horse-block—but it is an unfamiliar plant to me and I cannot see it in my mind's eye—only I feel it is exotic looking——"

"Would you mind telling me what the man is trying to do?" asked Aunt Jane.

Molly laughed. "He is drawing a picture of what he imagines Alloway to be like."

"He has evidently had a clear description on which to base his imagination," said Aunt Jane. "And your promise was?"

"To paint a picture of what I imagine his home to be like."

"His country home? Where is it?"

"In Vermont."

"In the mountains," said Aunt Jane, with a glance toward Molly's canvas. "Proceed."

"—Back of the house you have told me is the 'yard.' It isn't a bit like one of our New England farmyards. It's big and roomy and comfortable, and it oughtn't to be called a yard at all. But I can't see it

at all—not as I know it must be. I see it green with grass, and it can't be if the cattle sleep there and the chickens scratch and the mules and horses are hobbled waiting to be used. I think it must be something like Noah's back-yard on the top of Mount Ararat when he let the animals out of the Ark."

Aunt Jane gave a disapproving grunt, and Molly hurried on.

"Now for the landscape. It's flat, but it's lovely. How to reconcile the two when mountains are your sine qua non. Well, I think the place was laid out—'before the war'—little Miss Rebel——"

This time Aunt Jane's grunt was a snort, and Molly felt the blood rush to her cheeks. She wished she had skipped it. She would have if she hadn't come upon it too suddenly. Allen Carmichael wrote such a clear hand one read straight along and had no excuse for pausing.

"—by an excellent landscape gardener. Didn't you tell me that André Michaux spent a year in that neighborhood, once upon a time?

"And I think he sloped the ground up around the house so that it stands on a little eminence, just enough to make the contour of the lawn, which I'm afraid is not as smooth as it once was, and to give a wide outlook over the country. It's a dreamy country. You have told me so, and if you hadn't anyone could see it by looking at your eyes when you think of it. It stretches away, away, and you'd think you could see right around the world, but here and there, and almost everywhere, something comes and breaks your vision. Maybe it's a live oak, like a little hill all by itself; I

know what they look like: or maybe it's a swampy cypress grove, I think you said cypress only grew in swamps and they had web feet (frankly I can't see a web-foot tree); or maybe it's a patch of pines. They're different from our pines somehow, but I don't just know how. They're not as dense for one thing. I think they're more like the Umbrella Pines in Italy. And you see through between their trunks and far away again into the distance. And then there are Lob Lollies. What in the world are Lob Lollies? You curl up your nose when you speak of them. Only here and there you see a far-away horizon, and it calls you like a clear road to come and see what's around the corner. And there's moss everywhere, and it's sad, though it doesn't mean death as it does up here. And the negro voices chanting in the gloaming tone in with it. And between them both they put a look in your eyes which nobody can get up here, where we hurry and push and worry. But—beware, Mistress Molly, of the land where it is always afternoon. Don't stay too long down there, eating the Lotus and dreaming.

“Now, is my picture true? How am I to know?”

“Mary and I were truly grieved when Mr. Oliphant told us you had had to go home on account of your health. I suppose Mary has already written you this a dozen times. The city is dull now, and I have heard no news to tell you. There may be some in a little while, however. I think I shall leave Mr. Alden's office. I do not find myself a round enough peg for such a snug little hole. I am getting stronger every day and I long to get away into the wilds again. This—if you please—is not yet for publication——”

“You won't mention it, will you, Aunt Jane?”

Aunt Jane shook her head.

“—Please give my kind regards to your grandfather

and to Miss Jane, whom I am looking forward to meeting at no distant date.

“Very cordially yours,
“ALLEN M. CARMICHAEL.”

“I think he probably meant Janey. I don’t believe he knew you were here, Aunt Jane.”

“Probably. What does M. stand for?”

“Meredith. His mother’s name.”

“The Merediths?”

“No. English people.”

“There are some very good Merediths in England, I believe. Now I remember there was a young girl of that name visiting in Newport one summer, before the war. Doubtless it is the one. I seem to have heard that she married over here. But I lost track of Northerners—naturally I hardly cared not to. However, I have not been able to recall any Carmichaels whom I knew, though I have given the subject considerable thought. What do you know about them, Molly?”

“I don’t think they’ve ever been particularly aristocratic, probably. I don’t believe from what I’ve heard that they’ve even taken any prominent part in anything. Just plain hard working people. What they call the backbone of the country, you know. Allen Carmichael told me they’d been in silk for generations. And I guess they just attended strictly to business, and accumulated a fortune, and never thought of going into society at all, till this Miss Meredith married the father of these two, and wanted her children to have the position she was accustomed to in England. And they

have it, too. Nobody in New York has any better position."

"Humph!" said Aunt Jane. "I'm glad to have an account of them, even if it is not entirely satisfactory. I remember the girl now. An insipid little thing, but wholly unobjectionable. And I remember she was said to be well connected. Now I shall go down-stairs, my dear. Turn that picture around and let me look at it again first. It's not a bad idea of Vermont at all, for one who has never seen it. I suppose I shall kill myself on these stairs. There! You needn't come any further. I shall go to my room."

She dismissed her niece at the foot of the attic stairs and Molly, forgetting that she had ever thought Aunt Jane "rather sweet," sought Janey's sympathetic company. If she could have guessed what Aunt Jane was at that minute doing in her room!

CHAPTER XXX

INVITATIONS

GREAT-AUNT JANE enjoyed writing letters. It was one of the accomplishments in which, when she was young, before the war, she had been most carefully drilled. She sat very stiff and precise at her desk, her hands and her feet just so, and the resulting handwriting was a thing of beauty, the despair of Molly, who with unfeigned admiration, spent hours trying to imitate it. Aunt Jane wrote quickly as well as beautifully, at least her fingers never retarded her head. She addressed her envelope before beginning her letter.

"TO MISS MARY CARMICHAEL,
Washington Square, North,
New York,
New York.

"My dear Miss Carmichael: I hope you will forgive an old lady who is a stranger to you addressing you. My niece, Mary Alloway, has spoken to me so pleasantly of your family's kindness to her during her stay in your city this winter, that I feel you are not a stranger at all, but an unknown friend. I look upon it, indeed, as a deprivation that I have not yet had the pleasure of meeting you and your brother, and it would be a real grief to me did I not feel that this state of things cannot fail soon to be rectified. My niece's account of her reception in the North has made me wish

many times during the past months that it were possible for me to renew my acquaintance with that delightful country, to which I was a frequent visitor when I was young, before the unfortunate occurrences of the Sixties. My age and infirmities, however, debar me from the pleasures of traveling, and I must trespass on the kindness of my young friends if I am ever to see them. I am, therefore, making use of my old lady's privilege to ask you and your brother to take the long journey to Alloway, in order to give me the pleasure of meeting you both.

"Our summer, which, though we who are accustomed to it find it quite tolerable, might be disagreeable to you, will be upon us soon. Bearing this in mind, please set your own time for your visit which will be equally welcome at all times.

"My brother, Molly's grandfather, as well as Molly herself join me in hoping you will be able to gratify us.

"Molly asks me to give you her most affectionate remembrances.

"With kind regards to your brother, believe me, my dear Miss Carmichael, your sincere friend,

JANE MANIGAULT IZARD ALLOWAY."

Aunt Jane read the letter over carefully without finding so much as an "I" to dot. Then she sealed it, and sent for Ben.

"I wish him to take a letter to the post for me," she said to her nephew Robert.

"He'll be going over this evening anyway, Aunt Jane, in time for the mail. Won't that do? He's busy with me now."

But Aunt Jane was insistent. "This is a letter of importance, my dear Robert," she said. "My mind

will not be at rest till I know it's safely in the mail. Gratify an old lady's whim."

So Robert, with a few mental comments on old lady's whims, gratified it. Aunt Jane gave the letter to Ben with her own hand, without anyone seeing the superscription on it.

Molly and Jane from the window of the dining-room, where they were sorting clean linen, watched the proceeding with interest, speculating on what the mysterious letter might be. Molly felt, uneasily, that it had some connection with herself, but to whom it was addressed or what it contained she could not guess.

"She will tell you maybe sometime if she feels like it," said Jane with a shrug. She was still a little sulky.

She felt like it and owned up after supper when the gentlemen having smoked their pipes in the dining-room joined the ladies in the Yellow Room.

Mr. Alloway brought in the letter which he had received that morning. "Here, Molly," he said. "I think this will interest you. Read it aloud."

"Why it's from Uncle Joe!" exclaimed Molly, delightedly.

"My dear Robert: I am more glad than I can say of what you tell me concerning Molly's improved health. I was considerably troubled about her before she left me, and it is a real load off my mind to know she is herself again. You can have no idea how fond I have become of the child. Your expressions of kindness to myself, also, are most gratifying, and your cordial invitation to visit you at Alloway. Twice in one year, Robert! It seems like the old times come

back after fifty years! I wonder if you really want me, or if you do it from a mistaken feeling of obligation? I hope the former, but I'm not going to inquire too closely. I hold your invitation and at the risk of wearing out my welcome I am coming. I must see my little niece, Molly, again. I want to set her on the right road in her summer's work. She has never done landscape in oils and she may well feel lost at first ——"

"It is quite unnecessary for him to fear that," interrupted Aunt Jane. "I was up in Molly's studio to-day and she has done a remarkably fine landscape of Vermont scenery."

"I never said it was Vermont," exclaimed Molly. "I said it was something in my head."

"Very true, my dear, and I said Vermont was in your head,—as you express it. Proceed."

"—A few hints which I can give her may save her many months of work. *Entre nous*, Robert, 'tell it not in Gath; publish it not in the streets of Askelon,' lest I starve, that's all it amounts to. Just a few hints at short cuts. If you've got the talent and the perseverance you'll find the long way round anyhow, and if you haven't got them you'd better take another road. So I'm coming. Not that I would have you suppose Molly to be the only attraction. It has been a greater joy than I supposed my old heart capable of, to find your friendship again. I am eager as ever I was half a century ago to see you. I want to get better acquainted with the other member of your family, also, and I promise myself the pleasure of at least a glimpse of Miss Jane on my way through the city—if she will be so kind as to grant it to me.

"I hope to leave here one week from Monday and should reach Alloway on the following day.

"Please convey my best wishes to all your family, with especial ones to my niece, and remember me particularly to your good sister.

"And so I remain, my dear Robert, your most cordial old friend,

"JOSEPH OLIPHANT."

"Oh, I'm so glad!" exclaimed Molly.

"It will be fun," said Jane.

"It will be crowded," said Aunt Jane, "if the Carmichaels should choose the same time. And they are hardly likely to put off their coming much later, I should think."

"The Carmichaels! Who asked them to come? I never did!"

"I did, my dear. I do not approve of your having such intimate friends whom none of your family know anything about." She turned to her brother. "I hope you do not consider that I overstepped sisterly prerogative in doing this without consulting you, Robert. It seemed to me it should be done, in connection with the subject on which you and I were conversing the day of my arrival, and the season is advancing so rapidly that delay would have put it out of the question."

Mr. Alloway looked considerably agitated but for nothing in the world would he have admitted that he was annoyed with his sister.

"Certainly not, Jane. As long as we are able to make them comfortable, I shall only be too happy to

entertain anyone whom you may care to ask here. I have always urged you to look upon Alloway as a second home and to do precisely as you wish here. Come with me, Robert. I want to consult you about the possibility of repairing one of the dykes during the summer."

William followed his grandfather and brother, and Aunt Jane sent Janey after them.

"I wish to speak to your sister by myself, Jane. In a few minutes we will join you on the Bricks, and we will consult as to what we must do for the comfort of our guests." She waited till the door closed, and then proceeded. "I suppose you are surprised, Molly?"

"Very much, Aunt Jane. I think you might have consulted me."

"Am I to understand that you are not pleased?"

"No, I'm not pleased at all. It's going to be very awkward."

"The tobacco smoke has drifted across the hall," said Aunt Jane. "Will you please open the window and let it out. In my mother's day I remember the gentlemen were not allowed to smoke in the house at all."

"Mary Carmichael smokes. And you won't be able to ask her to sit in the dining-room."

"Indeed? I am glad I have asked her. But to return. For what reason is it going to be awkward?"

"For what reason? Didn't I tell you long ago that he's engaged to Adelaide Alden?"

Aunt Jane raised her expressive eyebrows. "I confess I find you very hard to understand since your return, Molly. And I am trying hard, though you don't look at this moment as though you credited me with any such effort. This morning you received a letter from Allen Carmichael, and you told me that in spite of his engagement you are on such a footing that it was perfectly natural for him to write to you. I admit that I could not comprehend what such a footing could be before I read the letter, and afterward still less. Now you further bewilder me by saying that it will be awkward to have him visit your family. The moderns are incomprehensible to my old brain. However, there is one sure thing and that is that I shall not permit you to be on any such footing as you attempt to describe with a young man neither your grandfather nor I have ever seen. My suggestion to you is that you relieve the awkwardness by inviting his fiancée at the same time."

"But I don't want her!"

"Indeed!" There was a pause. "It was certainly my intention that she should be invited," continued Aunt Jane. "I would have written the letter myself this morning, but I thought it would come more pleasantly to her, perhaps, if you wrote it."

"But I don't want to write to her."

"Very well then, we will let the matter drop. I shall bow to your better knowledge of modern ways, but I confess I should have thought there was awkwardness in *not* asking her."

"But why did you ask the Carmichaels?"

"I have told you, my dear Molly."

"But what difference can it make, when he's going to marry somebody else?"

"Let it pass for a reasonless whim if you wish. The point in question is Miss Alden."

"I tell you how it is, Aunt Jane. I don't want to write to her again till she has answered my letter about the picture."

"Nonsense, my dear child. You have told me, not once but a dozen times, that you considered that a mere act of form for courtesy's sake. Her answer will be the same. Here you have an opportunity to repay some of the obligations you are under to her. I should suppose you would welcome it. However, I can only reiterate what I have said already. I do not understand the footing of the moderns one toward another, any more than I understand anything else about them. And I leave it entirely to yourself. I shall join Jane on the Bricks."

Molly opened the door for her. Then she sat down at the desk and wrote her letter.

CHAPTER XXXI

" SARAH "

VERY deliberately Adelaide dipped her brush in the paint and wrote " Marjorie " in the left hand corner of the canvas. Then she stood away and looked at it, tipping her head to one side. " There," she said, " I've always liked that name. What next? A, I think. That's for Adelaide. Now, N-e-d-l-a. Nedla! It's rather crude, but still people don't go round turning names wrong end foremost to see what they sound like backwards, and it might be handy if there was a question. It doesn't sound badly, " Marjorie A. Nedla." Oh, Sarah! Sarah!"

She moved away from the picture and stood looking at it from a little distance. " Oh, she's wonderful," she thought half aloud. " She's beautiful! She's moving! I love her! She makes me want to laugh and cry. It is wonderful, that expression. The joy and sorrow on the mother's face, at once. The baby's adorable, the way he smiles and reaches up to her. Oh, Sarah, you're wonderful, with your smiles and your tears! I count on you, Sarah! There! Good-bye and good luck to you,—and to Marjorie." She leaned forward and kissed the painted lips, impetuously. Then she took a sheet of brown paper, carefully wrapped the picture up and took it down-stairs, pausing for a moment outside the door of her room

to make sure there was no one in the hall below. As she passed the drawing-room her mother called her.

"Is that you, Adelaide?"

"Yes, Mamma. I'll be there in a minute." She went on down to the basement. Her mother was standing in the hall when she came up again.

"Did you want me, Mamma?"

"Yes. Your Uncle Joe is in the parlor. He has been talking to me about you. He is disturbed."

Adelaide slipped her arm around her mother's neck, and drew her head down to whisper in her ear.

"I'll tell you a secret. Uncle Joe's turning into a granny! First it was Molly and now it's I!"

Her mother shook her head. "I don't know ——" she murmured. She looked troubled.

Adelaide went into the parlor laughing. "Hello, Grandma!"

Mr. Oliphant rose from the sofa. "It is all very well for you to joke like that, Adelaide. And if you have made up your mind you don't care about painting any more, why of course you are at liberty to drop it but ——"

"Now Uncle Joe! That's not fair! Haven't I been at the studio every morning, as regularly as clock work?"

"And much good it's done you! If you don't care any more than that you might as well drop it. I wash my hands of you. Absolutely! Absolutely!—Why didn't you come to my lecture this afternoon? I told you particularly I wanted you to hear what I said about that picture."

Adelaide's face fell. "Oh, Uncle Joe, I forgot."

"Forgot! Since this morning! That shows! I wash my hands of you! Absolutely I wash my hands of you!"

"I don't know what's come over you lately," said Mrs. Alden.

Adelaide looked really distressed. "It isn't that, Uncle Joe. I was busy this afternoon. I couldn't have come anyhow. It really isn't that I've lost interest in painting, or that I care one scrap less for it than I ever did. Really you haven't been a bit more disgusted than I have at the things I've been doing at the studio. They're perfectly awful. But after all it's your own fault. I knew I ought to go away, and I went, but you brought me back by the scruff of the neck."

"Of course I did! You can't stop now, unless you stop for good. Pull yourself together, Adelaide, and throw your heart into your work. Otherwise you might as well drop it. I have been thinking very seriously about you, and I don't know what to do. That's why I came here this afternoon. When you didn't come to the lecture, after all I said to you this morning, I decided to make one last effort, before I go away. There is absolutely no use in your going on like this. When I am not here to correct and stop you there will be worse than no use."

"You have been just the same lately about everything, Adelaide," said her mother. "You seem to have lost your grip on things. I don't understand you at all."

"Are you going away?" asked Adelaide ignoring her mother's remark.

"Yes, I ——"

Mr. Alden came in, shutting the front door with a bang, and "koo-ee"ing through the house. Adelaide ran out into the hall to meet him.

"Hello, Dad! We're in here. Uncle Joe's here."

"That's nice. Well, Joe! I'm glad Adelaide brought you back to tea."

"Good-evening, Jim. She didn't. At least in a sense she did. I came to scold her."

Mr. Alden looked weary as he sank into his chair. "Let her off, Joe. At least don't do it now. I've had enough of it for one day."

"Did something go wrong at the office?" asked Mrs. Alden.

"Allen's leaving. That boy's a fool! Ruined! Utterly ruined! I knew he would be. He'll pick up a thing and drop it again just as the whim strikes him. I've talked myself blue to the boy; taken trouble I've never taken for anyone else in my life, and I'm not likely to take it again, I can tell you. Ungrateful puppy! You might as well talk to the moon! He never will make a success of anything. Don't put in so much cream, Adele!"

Mrs. Alden spilled the tea into the saucer as she handed him his cup. "Oh, Jim! I'm so sorry! He seemed so interested, too!"

"Till the novelty wore off! A new game. 'Playing work.' I knew it wouldn't last. He ran it to the ground. I couldn't hold him back, work and work and

nothing but work would suit him. There's no steadiness in him. That's not the way to take hold. It makes me sick to see a young fellow like that, full of promise as he was, marked out for failure."

"What is he going to do now? Did he say?" asked Mrs. Alden.

"Say! I don't know. I didn't pay much attention to what he said. It's what a man does that counts. He said he couldn't stand the city any longer, or some such rot; he'd never intended to do the office end of the work anyhow, and wanted to get out into the wilds again. If he'd had a little patience I'd have sent him into the wilds, if that's what he wants, when he's well enough. But no, he can't wait. He's got to grab at the first chance that offers a change."

"He's got a chance, has he?"

"A two-penny chance with 'Bill and Son.' Nothing if he held on to it, which he won't do. He'll drop that too, the minute he feels like it. Have to soon, anyway. He isn't strong enough to stand roughing it. He looks badly. Don't you think so, Adelaide?"

"I don't know, Daddy. I haven't seen him for a couple of weeks, not since I was out at Spring Harbor." They were the first words Adelaide had spoken since Allen's name was mentioned. She had sat very silent in a corner of the sofa, turning her head to look at one speaker after another.

"That's so, he had the grace to apologize for not having been to see us. He said he was so tired after he got through his work he hadn't the energy to come any further up-town than Washington Square. It just

proves what I say. It makes me tired. A boy who's had every opportunity!"

"When is he going away, Jim? As soon as he leaves the office?"

"No, he leaves the office the end of next week and doesn't go to Montana, or Kamchatka, or wherever it is he is going, till the end of next month. Six weeks to loll around in. He expects to spend 'em here, I suppose. But I won't have it! Do you hear, Adele? I won't have it! Do you hear, Adelaide?"

"All right, Daddy. Just stop his lolling if you want to." She turned to Mr. Oliphant, changing the subject. "You were saying you're going away, Uncle Joe. Where are you going?"

"I'm going to Alloway."

Mr. Alden stopped scowling and began to smile. "How's my friend Molly?" he asked.

"Quite herself again, her grandfather writes. I'm going down chiefly on her account. I want to start her right on landscapes. By the way, Adelaide, that might be the solution of your difficulties. People do get stale with studio drudgery month in, month out. I wish you and I could get a chance to do a little outdoor work together. It might be worth while to go into the Park if we can't do better."

"We could do better at Alloway," said Adelaide. "I had an invitation to come down there from Molly."

Mr. Oliphant jumped out of his chair in his delight, sitting down again so quickly and with such a jerk that his feet went up in the air, and Mrs. Alden feared for her springs. He twirled his mustache vigorously.

"The very thing, Adelaide! The very thing! I don't know when I have heard anything that has given me so much pleasure, real pleasure. I have had the impression that you and Molly had quarreled. I'm delighted! More delighted than I can tell you. We will go out and paint together, we three, every day. It will do you no end of good in every possible way, and as for me, it will be more happiness than ——"

"Wait, Uncle Joe! I never said I was going. I said Molly had asked me."

"'Never said you were going'? Why, of course you're going. Why shouldn't you go?"

"I don't think I want to, very much."

"Well, you should want to. If you don't, I wash my hands of you. Absolutely, I wash my hands of you! It's just the thing you need. You will learn more, working like that with Molly and me, than you could learn in any other way in months and months. Of course you're going! Of course you are!"

"When are you going, Joe?" asked Mrs. Alden.

"A week from Monday. Adelaide can come down with me."

"Just the time when Allen Carmichael will be free again. I think it would be rather a pity for Adelaide to ——"

Adelaide interrupted her mother, cutting in sharply. "Of course I'm going, Uncle Joe. I was only fooling to get a rise out of you. You do rise so beautifully, you know."

Mr. Oliphant grunted. "Rise," he repeated. "Rise! I'll get the accommodations."

Adelaide was rather dismayed as she realized, on her way up-stairs, that she had committed herself definitely to a visit to Alloway. She was amazed at herself for having done it, yet more amazing still was the discovery that she was not sorry she had done it. Something seemed suddenly to have loosened in her brain, a suspense which had forced her mind into one channel till it ached. She would be away during the time when Allen was in the city and at leisure. She knew definitely, now, that she would not see him again, for years and years, not till to-day was a hazy yesterday to smile at. The thought made her wince, yet it was better than not knowing. Very deliberately she turned her mind to "Sarah" and smiled, with a little song under her breath. Then she thought of Molly, and, with Allen off the horizon, in Montana or Kamchatka, the thought was very pleasant. It would be fun to be with her, and to paint all day in the open air, with her and Uncle Joe. She looked out of the window at the thick, grimy fog, and the chilly people walking along carefully as though their bones ached. And the song came out from under her breath. She sat down to write to Molly.

"I'd love to come. I'll come a week from Monday with Uncle Joe."

Not till the letter was sealed and stamped did she remember Molly's first letter about showing the "Studio Study." Should she open it and add a post-script? No, it was only Molly's exaggerated politeness which made her ask. Of course she didn't take the question seriously. And if she did, the suspense

wouldn't do her any harm. There was still lots of time. It would teach her not to try carrying old-fashioned manners into a new-fashioned world. Besides the letter had to go now, if it was to catch the evening train. She went down-stairs with it, singing aloud, hugging the new peace which was in her heart. But hugging it gently, too, because, deep in her soul, she knew it was a precarious peace, easily shattered.

CHAPTER XXXII

GUESTS

THE brasses were very bright at Alloway Place. From top to bottom of the house there was not a scuttle or a fender in which you could not see your face reflected, thin and high, like an aristocratic Cavalier, or low and broad, like the Neanderthal Man. Young Jane was tired of polishing. The larders were stocked to overflowing with things to make one's mouth water, but young Jane could not look at them. She was tired of cooking.

Everyone had accepted. Mr. Oliphant and Adelaide were coming to-day, by the next train, and the Carmichaels to-morrow. Down to the tiniest crawling piccaninny the plantation thrilled with excitement. Never since before the war had there been such a stir and bustle.

Out in the "offices" the fat old darkies jostled each other. Aunt Jane's Charity and her sister Venus had come out from Charleston for the occasion, and Hannah had farmed out her baby so that she might meet the emergency, for which she took great credit to herself, though she would not have missed it for a kingdom. Mom Clio bossed them all in strident Gullah, and, in turn, shriveled up under Aunt Jane's cold eye.

Aunt Jane said, "I think it is quite ridiculous to

make such a fuss about a little thing. When I was young, before the war, this would have been an everyday occurrence." But she was as excited as anybody. She was tyrannical.

"A slave driver, as though it was before the war," young Jane said, escaping now and then to the studio, where Molly sat all day, as aloof and unconcerned as a "squirrel in the top of a tree. It doesn't affect you any." Jane was too exasperated to care about her grammar. "But I don't think it's fair, just because I'm four years younger!"

As a matter of fact, it affected Molly a great deal. Ever since the letters of acceptance had come she had been in a state bordering on panic. She thought Aunt Jane a worse slave driver even than her sister did, though she hid the thought under the reiterated statement that Aunt Jane was "rather sweet." Her brain ached like a tired muscle from going over and over the possibilities of the coming fortnight. Treadmill fashion she went round and round the same ground, beginning with why they were coming and ending with why they weren't coming together. She felt like running away, but there was nowhere to go. She almost hoped she might get sick, so as to put off the inevitable. Aunt Jane, looking at her, almost feared she would, her face was so strained. As the time drew near, she, too, began to have certain misgivings as to the wisdom of what she had done. But there was no help for it now. The little car was standing chugging at the horse-block, waiting for Molly to go meet the first contingent.

"Molly! It's time to go!—Molly! Hurry up, child! You'll be late."

Molly was hooking up Jane's dress. "All right, Aunt Jane. I'll be there in a minute."

"What did you say? If you want to speak to me you'll have to come here. You don't expect me to come up-stairs to you, do you?"

Molly smothered an exclamation. "Wait a minute, Janey." She went to the top of the stairs. "I said there's lots of time, Aunt Jane. I'm watching the clock. The train isn't due at Four Oaks for an hour."

"We used to allow an hour and a quarter to drive there, Molly."

"That was with horses. Half an hour is enough in the car."

"Hardly, I think, Molly. You might burst a tire."

"That allows plenty of time."

"It is better to be early than late, you know. You should be on the platform waiting for them."

"I will be, Aunt Jane."

"What's the matter? Aren't you ready?"

"Yes. I'm just doing up Jane's dress."

"What is the child putting on, that she can't dress herself? Send her to me."

"All right, Aunt Jane."

"I won't go!" said Jane. "I'm not going to have her look at the back of this dress and tell me all the buttons are off."

"Well, they are. You ought to sew them on."

"They don't show when it's properly pinned over."

"Molly! Are you going?"

"Right away, Aunt Jane! Darn! Give me another pin!"

Aunt Jane came tapping up the stairs and threw the door open. "Molly, if you are not ready I shall send one of the boys. I insist that someone shall be there to meet them."

"We're all ready now. Put on your hat in the car, Janey."

At the last moment Aunt Jane held her back to look her over.

"You look very sweet," she said, giving her a kiss and pulling a curl out from under her hat brim. "As my mother used to say, if you only behave as well as you look, you will do very well, my dear. Now have a good time. Let me see you, Jane."

But Jane, with pins on her conscience, wriggled away from her.

"I'm all right; Molly fixed me. Besides, there isn't time."

She ran down-stairs and jumped into the car beside Molly.

"Gate!"

A dozen round-eyed piccaninnies jumped to open it, cheering as though the two girls were going to a triumph.

Jane shoved herself back into the seat with a kick against the dashboard; her feet did not reach the floor. "Well," she said, "the fun's begun at last! I didn't think it ever would, did you?"

"Things have a way of beginning if they're going to end."

"Is that philosophy? What's Mary Carmichael like? I suppose she's the only one we'll see anything of. The others will be off spooning together."

"No they won't. Their engagement isn't announced yet."

"That doesn't matter."

"Yes it does, and don't you forget it!"

"Oh, I shan't. Wouldn't it be fun if one of the boys fell in love with her? One of us ought to marry money for the sake of the family. Which one do you think would be best for her, Molly? Oh well, you don't need to talk if you don't want to. I don't care!" She kicked the dashboard again to get back into the seat. "Here's the train! We weren't very much too early after all!"

Mr. Oliphant's eyes shone behind his glasses as he got into the car beside Molly on the front seat. Adelaide, crowding in with Jane and the bags in the back, exclaimed with delight. "Isn't this lovely? Feel the air! Oh, Uncle Joe, look at that color—the red tendrils of the vine over there. What is it smells so sweet?"

"It's the smell of the swamps."

"Is that a cardinal bird? Oh, Molly, I'm so glad I came!"

The precarious peace had deepened. Molly's warm welcome and her frank, cordial smile seemed to give it a surer foundation. Squirrel-eyed Jane, casting furtive glances at her as they bumped together on the back seat of the car, made her want to laugh. Everything she saw was quaint and unfamiliar. She had the

sense of adventure. She was very glad she had come.

"Uncle Joe and I took a drive around Charleston this morning," she said. "I think it's the most fascinating place I ever saw, with the pink stucco houses, and the high walls with the gardens bulging over the top—and the wisteria, and those beautiful iron grills. I'm crazy about it, the narrow streets and the two-wheeled mule carts. But I can't believe it's really in America. It ought to be next door to Gibraltar somewhere by rights."

"You must tell Aunt Jane all that. She loves to hear Charleston praised."

"Only she'll tell you it was more beautiful before the war," said Jane.

"It was, too." Mr. Oliphant sounded a little snappy, Jane thought.

"I don't care if it was. It's beautiful enough now. I get awfully tired of being told I've missed the best of everything! Aunt Jane's out here at Alloway now, you know, Uncle Joe."

She had been screwing up her courage for ten minutes to call him that. She was quite disappointed that he didn't notice the name.

"You don't say so! That's very nice! I'm delighted to hear it. Delighted! It must be over fifty years since I saw her last—not since Sixty—before the war. What a charming girl she was—charming, charming."

Jane wanted to say, "Before the war," but checked herself in time, and changed the sentence. "I hope

you're not going to tell us the girls were more beautiful, too, before the war,—like everything else."

"At least they looked so to me," he answered.

"There's a pretty speech for you!" exclaimed Adelaide. "What shall we do to him, Molly? Turn him out into the swamp?"

"Pity my failing eyesight, my dear," he suggested, blinking at her through his glasses.

CHAPTER XXXIII

DREAM MOUNTAINS

AUNT JANE was waiting on the Bricks to greet them. She took both Adelaide's hands in hers.

"So this is Adelaide Alden. We have heard a great deal about you, my dear. Molly never tires of singing your praises, nor of telling us all the kind things you did for the poor little stranger in your city. I am very glad to know you." She kissed her cheek. "I want Molly's friends to be my friends, and you and I don't start as strangers, you know, my child. Both your father and mother were dear friends of mine when I was young, before the war. That makes me almost know you already, doesn't it?"

"It gives you pretty good ground for guessing, anyway," said Adelaide, laughing.

Aunt Jane patted her hand delightedly. "Very well answered, my dear, very well answered indeed. I can see that you and I are going to get along famously together." She turned to Mr. Oliphant. "And here's a real old friend."

Mr. Alloway came out of the house. He had grown stiffer during the winter, and walked slowly, with the help of his stick.

"How do you do, Miss Adelaide. I am very glad to welcome you to Alloway, for your own sake, and

for the sake of your father, who used to be here a great deal in the old days,—when you and I were boys, Joe, old fellow ——” His greeting was interrupted by a crash inside the house.

William’s voice cried out, “Good heavens, Bob, are you hurt?”

“No. I’m all right, I guess. That was some crack I got, though, and no mistake.”

The two boys came out onto the Bricks, William supporting his brother, who was covered from head to foot with white powder, and reeled a little as he walked. They were both of them so preoccupied that they did not notice the strangers. Robert sat down on the horse-block, holding his head in his hands.

“Well, it’s down at last, the ceiling, sir,” he said to his grandfather. “Lucky it didn’t kill anybody.”

“It pretty nearly did kill you,” exclaimed William. “I thought he was dead! Knocked him over like a ninepin. Are you really all right? Don’t you think you’d better go lie down?”

“No, I’m all right. The stars are beginning to fade. I did feel a bit groggy at first. Let’s see how much really came down.” He lifted his head from his hands and caught sight of Adelaide and Mr. Oliphant. “Hello! I beg your pardon!” He jumped up. “This is a pretty greeting! It’s Miss Alden, isn’t it? I know it must be. The Carmichaels aren’t coming till tomorrow.”

The precarious peace was shattered, like a globe of glass.

“Yes, I’m Adelaide Alden,” she answered. “I’m

much more concerned about your head than your greeting. Aren't you really hurt?" A few minutes later she turned to Jane. "Did he say the Carmichaels were coming to-morrow? Mary and Allen?"

"Yes. Didn't you know that? How funny."

"Why funny?"

"Why because ——" She remembered in time and checked herself. "I just thought you would."

Aunt Jane interrupted them. "Let us go into the house now. Good gracious, what a looking place to welcome you to! We will seek refuge in the Yellow Room, if you please, Adelaide, till you can get up the stairs to your room. Come, Molly, Jane will look after this. Call the servants to sweep it up before it gets tracked all over the place."

Mr. Alloway and his two grandsons had already come into the house and were standing now in the well of the stairs looking up at the havoc. They were so intent that they did not hear the others come in, and Adelaide, without meaning to, caught a scrap of their conversation.

"There isn't any help for it, Grandfather. We'll simply have to let it stay down."

Mr. Alloway gave a bitter laugh. "Yes. What comes down, stays down. It's fifty years since I've had a thousand dollars to spend on the place, and as far as I can see, it's likely to be fifty more."

"That's all very well," said William, "but there comes a time when things can't stay down any longer. The place is hardly weather-proof now."

Adelaide closed the door of the Yellow Room has-

tily. She had been checked there by Mr. Oliphant who stopped with an exclamation when he caught sight of Molly's two mountain views hanging on the wall opposite the fireplace, where the spots were.

"Excellent, Molly! Excellent! I'm delighted with them. They show great progress. Steady progress. Next to your 'Studio Study' they are the best things you have done, and I did not expect you to do as well again for a couple of years at least. Where did you get your subjects?" He turned on her suddenly, glaring through his glasses. "They're not from the flat, are they?"

"Oh no. They're not from the flat! I'd never have the patience. They're just fancy things out of my head."

"She did them to please me," said Aunt Jane. "I asked her to paint something we could hang on the wall there. The bareness has always distressed me since my brother sent away the Lely's. And then, would you believe it, I could hardly induce the foolish child to let me bring them down-stairs. She wanted to hide them away in the attic because she said they were only dreams."

"Dreams?" repeated Mr. Oliphant. "Of course they're dreams. All pictures must be dreams before they can become pictures. By the way, Molly, I'm displeased with you. Very much displeased."

"With me?" asked Molly. "Why?"

"You haven't entered the 'Studio Study' properly at the Academy. I told you before you left New York that you must do it immediately. Listen to the letter

from Smith Jones. He's on the committee, and a close friend of mine.

"‘Dear Joe:— About that matter —’ No, no. Let me see. Here we are —

"‘I have a bit of news to tell you. I know it will please you. Your little protégée, Miss Alloway, is booked for a big triumph. But——! We had our meeting yesterday and we awarded her “Studio Study” the Gilman thousand dollar prize, for the best painting done by an American trained student. We had already instructed the secretary to notify her to that effect, when we made the surprising discovery that the picture had never been formally submitted to us. You remember you sent it around from your studio yourself, saying Miss Alloway would fill in the blanks and send them to us within a few days. She has never done so. Her picture ought to have been dropped at once, but we all knew how much you had set your heart on its success, and we liked it so much ourselves that we adjourned our meeting for a week to give her time to comply with the formalities. If her papers are not in by that time, good-night to her! The second prize goes to a girl called Marjorie Nedla. Did you ever hear of her? We are in hopes you can tell us something about her because her work suggests your school. She has done a beautiful thing. A young mother in deep mourning, evidently a widow, leaning over her baby. The expression on her face is one of the most telling things I have ever seen on canvas. Joy and sorrow are there at once, a truly poignant thing. It is called simply, “Sarah.” There is going to be a great deal of speculation about Miss Nedla if she does not reveal herself.

"‘John Kenneth ——’

"That's all that concerns you. And you ought to

be ashamed of yourself, Molly Alloway! You really ought! If you think you can do that sort of thing just because you have talent, you are very much mistaken, I can tell you, very much mistaken indeed! You'll find yourself coming out at the small end of the horn one of these days! Where are your papers?"

"Up-stairs."

"Go and bring them down here this minute. I'll help you fill them out. Who's this Nedla girl, anyhow, I'd like to know? He says her work looks like my school. I never remember having any student by that name. Do you, Adelaide?"

"No, I don't, Uncle Joe." Adelaide did not turn from looking at the pictures as she spoke.

"Molly," said Aunt Jane, "I really think you had better go help your sister. There is no knowing what that scatter-brained child will do."

"All right, Aunt Jane." Molly hurried from the room.

Mr. Oliphant went after her. "Before you do anything else, Molly, I want you to get those papers."

Aunt Jane and Adelaide were left together.

"Dear me," exclaimed Aunt Jane. "To think of Molly making such a success of her painting. I must say I never took it very seriously myself. I suppose I am old-fashioned, but I cannot bring myself to feel that it is quite the thing for ladies to enter into competitions like this. It takes the bloom. Nevertheless, as I often say to my great-nieces, one must learn to live in one's generation. And it is certainly gratifying to have Molly do it well if she is going to do it at all."

"I should think you'd be very proud of her. She'll be famous before you know it. Uncle Joe has said so from the beginning."

"He seemed very much pleased with these two pictures, didn't he? And I must say they are quite charming. Not that I consider myself a judge, though I used to paint a good deal, myself, when I was young, before the war." Aunt Jane turned a little in her chair so she could see the pictures better. "I am glad he liked them. I must tell you about them, my dear. There is quite a romance connected with them,—at least I suspect there is. But then I'm a sentimental old woman, with an incorrigible taste for romance. I may be mistaken, but—I don't think they're so bad that Mistress Molly need want to hide them away, do you?"

"I should say not."

"Then there must be another reason, mustn't there? You can't imagine what a time I had persuading her to bring them down." Aunt Jane wore a knowing smile as though she were telling the best of jokes. "You know Molly never saw a mountain in her life! She says she got them out of her head. But I think it was her heart they came from. What do you suppose they represent?"

"Something special?"

"Oh, indeed, something very special! They're Molly's idea of Allen Carmichael's place in Vermont."

"Oh!" Adelaide said it very quickly, in a startled voice.

"That's the reason she wanted to keep them out of

sight! And that's the reason I am so anxious to see this young man!"

She paused but Adelaide said nothing.

"It always amuses me," she went on. "These children,—they are the second generation I have brought up, you know, my dear, my brother's children and his grandchildren. They think I can't see a thing directly under my nose." Aunt Jane laughed, a low little chuckling laugh. "They are very amusing. These two have a game between them. A very pretty game, I must say. Molly was to paint a picture of his home, and he was to write a picture of hers. You see the point? Things neither of them had seen except through the other's eyes. It is quite poetic. I'm sure he must have thought of it. He seems to be a poet, judging from his letter. He drew a really lovely picture of Alloway. I hope he won't be disappointed, but I'm afraid he may be. 'A temple enshrining a goddess.' 'A dreamy land, I can tell by your eyes. It has put a look in them which no one can get in the North.' And a great deal more of the same kind. I hope he's as attractive as he sounds. Is he, my dear?"

"I like him very much," said Adelaide. "But I suppose you may be prejudiced when you've been brought up with a person as though you were brother and sister."

Aunt Jane patted her knee. "Molly told me you had known him all your life. That's the reason I thought you would enjoy their little romance. Molly, I suppose, would never forgive me if she knew I had told you. You won't tell, my dear, will you?" She

dismissed the subject abruptly. "Now I want to hear all about your dear mother and father. They are well, I hope?"

"Yes, thank you. They're very well."

"I suppose they are more active than I am. They would be,—they must be ten years younger. I had forgotten that. It's one of the strange things in life, you will find, my dear, that the older you grow the less age seems to count, except, of course, in the disabilities it brings. I suppose I seem like a Methuselah to you, but to myself I don't seem a day older than I did at your age. I'm stiffer, and I have more aches and pains, but those are not myself. And, for the matter of that, there were many days then when I felt less able than I do to-day. But that reminds me that this is my rest hour. I must go take my nap. Shall I show you your room, if we can get up-stairs?"

A few minutes later, Molly, coming to her aunt's room, found that lady in the dark with the blinds drawn down.

"Good gracious! You're not sick, too, are you?" she exclaimed.

"No, I'm not sick. I—I wish I could make the world go as I want, Molly!"

"Aunt Jane! Don't worry about the ceiling. We'll manage somehow."

"I'm not. What's a ceiling? I like your friend, Molly. She is a charming girl. I hope she will have a happy life. Why did you say 'too'?"

"Robert's got a splitting headache. He's all in."

"Has he gone to bed?"

"No, he won't. He says it's wasting precious time. Grandfather wants him to send for the doctor, but he won't do that either, because he says it's wasting precious money."

"This precious money! What a lot one has to think about it when one hasn't got it. I never used to at all, when I was young, before the war. Go away, child. I want to sleep. Has Adelaide said anything about your picture?"

"No."

Aunt Jane sighed as the door closed.

CHAPTER XXXIV

MOLLY ASKS. ADELAIDE ANSWERS

THE two boys were in the second-story hall, tapping the ceiling. Molly paused to watch them. "Is any more of it going to come down, do you think, Robert?" she asked.

"I'm afraid so. I think we had better try to patch it ourselves, William. We can't make it any worse than it is now. I'll ride over to Four Oaks and get some plaster."

"Not to-day, Robert!" exclaimed Molly. "You ought not to go out in the sun with your headache. It's getting awfully hot. I wish you would go lie down."

"I want to get this done right away before it hurts someone."

"Then let William go for the plaster."

"No. I want the air, the wind on my face."

"I think you're making a mistake," insisted Molly, knocking at Adelaide's door. "May I come in? I thought maybe you'd like to go for a walk before it gets too hot."

Adelaide was standing by the window reading a letter. It had reached her the day before just as she was leaving the house for the train, but she had stuck it in her pocket unopened, and promptly forgotten it. Now she had drawn it out again and was reading it in an effort to forget the past hour. She wanted to forget.

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There was no use in thinking. She was in the current and must go where it carried her. Nothing she could do would change its course. Allen Carmichael would come to-morrow as inevitably as the sun rose, and the "Studio Study" would take first prize and "Sarah" second. Even yet she did not think seriously enough of Molly's request for permission to show her picture to realize she could withhold it. It had not even occurred to her that it was because she had delayed giving it that Molly had not filled in her papers. She wondered why nobody guessed who Marjorie Nedla was. It seemed so obvious. If they did not guess she would not tell them. She would have if it had won, but not now that it had taken second place to Molly's picture. Always second to Molly!

The letter was from a girl at Clam Neck, a neighbor of the Carmichaels. She had heard Adelaide was there spending Sunday and she was sorry that she did not see her. She told her this bit of news and that, and then —

"There is a question I want to ask you, you bad child! Where do I stand in your scale of friendship? I, who have been flattering myself I stood so high! Why should I have to wait till Dr. Bell comes to order Listerine for a sore throat before hearing your great news? Have I your gracious permission to congratulate you?"

Adelaide was very close to hatred of Molly at the instant she knocked at the door.

She answered her question mechanically. "Yes, I'd like to go for a walk very much."

"We'll go down to the river through the woods, I think," said Molly as they left the house. "We'll be in the shade most of the way except just crossing the field here. It has grown very hot all of a sudden."

The path through the woods was on an old dyke with steep crumbly sides. Molly warned Adelaide about it.

"Be careful you stay in the middle," she said. "The ground on either side is more swampy than it looks. You'd get mired if you stepped into it. It used to be rice fields. I remember distinctly when they flooded. It was when I was a tiny kid, fifteen years ago or more, I guess."

"Do you mean to say these trees have grown up in that time?"

"It can't be much more. They grow quickly down here."

"Your woods are so very different looking from ours."

"I suppose they must be. I'm sorry I never got out of town while I was North."

"That was because you left so much sooner than we expected you to. But it's only postponed. You'll be up there most of the time after this probably."

"I don't know about that."

"Of course you will. Do you suppose Uncle Joe would let you stay away even if you wanted to? which you don't."

"Of course I don't. But you can't have everything you want in this life. You've got to cut your coat according to your cloth, and my cloth isn't big enough to cover New York. There's no use in pretending about

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it, because we both know I wasn't earning one-half the things Uncle Joe was giving me. That was all very well for one winter, especially as I didn't realize it till I'd been there some time. But I couldn't do it again, possibly."

"But you can make your own way now."

"Perhaps I can. But I'll feel surer when I actually have. 'Il faut toucher l'argent,' you know. By the way, how about my showing that picture? You haven't told me yet, and I have to send in my application right off if I'm going to. You heard what Uncle Joe said."

Ever since they had left the house Molly had been screwing up her courage to ask the question. She put it now with a rush, her words tumbling over each other.

It came like a stroke of lightning to Adelaide, showing her possibilities she had not even imagined before. It pointed the way to triumph, and woke the war she dreaded within her. "Sarah" could win if she wished it. Everything she had been longing for was at her hand for the taking. She thought of Allen's coming to-morrow, but that and everything wore a different aspect. Was she not here too? The temptation came upon her too suddenly, and too sharply. It beat down her defenses and gave strength to the power she feared. Very slowly she spoke, very deliberately, as though every word were weighed. But every word was an amazement and dismay to her, as though it were not she who spoke it.

"I didn't write, on purpose, because I thought it

would be easier to talk it over together. Because I want you to understand how I feel about it, Molly. I don't want you to think it's —— But you do understand, I know. Your asking shows you felt it was not like exhibiting an ordinary portrait. If it had been that, I'd have loved to have you do it, and have it talked about and fussed over. I'd have been proud both for myself and you. But this —— You let your imagination run away with you too much, you really did. The contrast between the two faces, mine and the model's, is awful. You've made a cruel creature of me, and I can't bear to be held up to all the world like that, Molly. I can't, I simply can't. I tried to think it didn't matter, and I didn't care. But I do care. I knew that after Uncle Joe's tea but I went on trying because I knew how much it meant to you. But, Molly, I simply can't!"

Molly spoke very low. "I'm sorry, Adelaide. I—— I didn't think. I'll cut it up."

She turned with a trembling smile, and all Adelaide's card-house of triumph fell in a crash of shame.

"Oh, Molly. I take it back. I didn't mean it. I —— How could I? It was just jealousy, Molly. You must show it. Of course you must. Say you will."

Molly looked at her wonderingly. "Of course I won't show it."

"But you must, Molly, please! I didn't mean it, I tell you. If you don't I ——"

Molly interrupted her. "Poor old Adelaide. You're a dear to try to take it back, because you see I care.

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But you did mean it. And I ought not to care. I ought to have seen for myself. I'm quite ashamed of myself. Why, you're crying!" She put her arm around her neck and kissed her. "Why, Adelaide, it doesn't matter anyhow, not anything like enough for that! If Uncle Joe's right, I'll do lots of others that are better, and if I can't, who wants to be a one-picture artist? I'm sure I don't!" She took a short cut to the house. "It's the heat makes you feel like that. You look dead tired. I was an idiot to bring you out. You'd better go lie down before dinner."

"I will." Adelaide ran up-stairs to her room and wept there as though her heart would break.

CHAPTER XXXV

"I SHALL NOT EXHIBIT IT"

"MOLLY." Her grandfather's voice called her as she passed the door of the Yellow Room. "Have you seen your brother?"

"Robert? He rode over to Four Oaks to get some plaster for the ceiling. He thought the air might do his head good."

"He fell off his horse. Rob Roy came back without him an hour ago, and William went after him in the car and found him lying unconscious by Dead Man's Creek."

"Grandfather! Is he hurt?"

"I don't know. He is still unconscious. Your aunt and Jane are with him. William has gone for the doctor. I sent Joe Oliphant with him. I had to get rid of him somehow. What have you done with the girl?"

"She has gone up to her room."

"I hope she'll stay there,—won't get it into her head she ought to be useful."

The old gentleman looked very frail and thin, leaning back in his chair by the fire. "Molly!" he exclaimed suddenly. "What are we going to do if anything should happen to Robert? Even a month's illness at this season would be almost crippling to us."

"Don't worry about that, Grandfather. We can always tide over somehow. William may have to spend the summer here, instead of going North as he hoped. But there's a good time coming. I'll be able to help along soon."

"I had never intended that you should help along at all, Molly. Robert and I have talked it over many times this winter, and we are of one mind about it. Every cent you made was to be invested for your own benefit. But I'm afraid this time you will have to step into the breach, my dear child. We shall, of course, regard it as a loan, but it is the only way I know by which we can possibly get a loan now. Alloway is so heavily mortgaged already that I am afraid we might be foreclosed if we tried to raise another cent on it. Your thousand dollars—or two, if it should turn out so much,—will get us over the worst of it if Robert is not permanently disabled."

"Of course he isn't permanently disabled! It's just the heat coming on top of the knock on his head. Tomorrow he'll have a scorching headache, and the next day he'll be all right."

"I don't like his being unconscious so long."

"Neither do I, but I don't think it means anything. Don't you remember once before, when he was a kid and one of the mules threw him, he was unconscious for hours? But, Grandfather, you mustn't count my chickens before they're hatched, you know. If I had a thousand dollars Alloway shouldn't wait long for a new roof, but I haven't."

"Hasn't your Uncle Joe told you? Your picture

has been awarded the Gilman thousand dollar prize. So of that much we are sure. As to the other thousand, your Uncle Joe says that a picture which has been talked about as the 'Studio Study' has already, and is sure to be at the Academy, is likely to sell for at least that amount before the exhibition closes. There! I'm glad I had the pleasure of telling you! Give me a kiss, my dear. To think of my little Molly being famous and keeping the roof over her old grandfather's head!"

Molly's hands were tight clenched as she stood beside his chair, a little behind him, so he could not see her face.

"I'm not going to exhibit the picture, Grandfather."

He was silent so long she was afraid he had not heard her. She had spoken very low.

"I don't think I understood what you said, Molly."

"Yes you did, Grandfather. I said I wasn't going to exhibit the picture. Uncle Joe must have told you I had not filled out the entries."

"Why are you not going to exhibit it?"

"Because I don't want to."

Mr. Alloway twisted himself around in his chair to look at her.

"Sit down here in front of me, Molly," he said. "Has your aunt been telling you that it is an unlady-like thing for you to do, to exhibit and sell your pictures? Your aunt's ideas on such matters are right, absolutely and eternally right. Were it in my power to prevent it I should never allow a penny to cheapen your genius. It is one of the saddest things which this

sad age has brought with it, Molly, the necessity for our ladies being sullied by commercialism. I don't wonder you recoil from it, my child. I am glad to see that you do. But, my little girl, it must be faced. And I would rather see you do that than go out as a governess in some upstart family who wanted to feed and fatten on your knowledge and your traditions and your good breeding, and all that your ancestors have bequeathed to you. That would be intolerable to me."

"It would be intolerable to me, too, Grandfather. But I don't feel the same way about painting at all. I'm proud of it. And I do hope to exhibit and to sell—lots of things. But not this particular picture, Grandfather. I'm not going to exhibit this."

"Why not, Molly? This is no time for whims. The money is of vital importance to us. We must have it, and we cannot get it anywhere else."

"We can't get it there, either, Grandfather. Oh, please do believe me when I say we can't! It isn't a whim. I can't! I can't!" She put her head down against his knee and began to sob.

Mr. Alloway laid his hand on her head. But he left it there still and uncaressing.

"And you will give me no explanation?" he asked. "Very well, then, I will take your word for it that it is not your whim to turn us out of our home. Tomorrow I shall go into town and offer Alloway for sale. Perhaps some of your Northern friends may buy it, now you have given so many of them an opportunity to see it at its worst."

"Oh, Grandfather! Don't talk like that. Robert isn't going to be sick, I'm sure."

"If he should be, it would be only another rock in an already sunken boat."

The front door slammed and in a moment Jane and Mr. Oliphant came into the Yellow Room. Mr. Oliphant exclaimed when he saw Molly in tears.

"Molly, my dear child! Don't let yourself go like that. Robert isn't dangerously ill. We were talking to the doctor on our way home and he said he felt sure, though of course he had not seen him, that he would be well again in a few days. He said if it had been concussion, or anything of that nature, he would have become unconscious at once. My, but it is hot!" He mopped his forehead with a blue and white spotted handkerchief, taking off his glasses and then putting them carefully back again, with a wiggle of his head to adjust them.

"Dr. Lea impressed me most agreeably. You are fortunate in having such a reliable looking man, Bob. No nonsense about him—none at all."

The doctor came into the room while Mr. Oliphant was singing his praises. "It isn't anything to worry about, Mr. Alloway," he said. "It's just as I supposed from what William told me. A touch of heat on top of his hard knock. He'll have a headache for a day or two, and then he'll forget all about it. I've given him something to make him sleep. To-morrow morning if his head aches badly he had better stay where he is, but if he feels like it he can get up, though of course, he must keep quiet. Make him comfortable

on the Bricks and let his sisters entertain him." He turned to Molly with a bow. "I'm very glad to see you home again, Miss Molly. I trust you had a very successful winter."

"Yes, I had a very nice winter, thank you."

"And she's come back famous!" exclaimed Mr. Oliphant. "You wait a little while and you'll be proud to know her, I can tell you, Dr. Lea."

"Molly, you would better go and see if you can help your aunt," said her grandfather.

Molly went. She was glad to go. Her lips were trembling so she was afraid someone would notice it. Her eyes were so misty with tears that she tripped over the edge of the rug and nearly fell.

Robert was quite conscious again. "Hello, Moll, old girl!" he cried. "Congratulations. William has been telling me; Mr. Oliphant told him. Who'd have thought of the little one carrying all the weight of the household on her shoulders? I don't like it, Moll, but I guess it's got to be this time. And mighty lucky we are to have the shoulder."

"The doctor said he'd given you something to make you sleep. You'd better curl up now, Robert. We can talk about that another time."

"All right. But I guess that will make me sleep better than any stuff he gave me."

Mom Clio appeared at the door announcing that "Supper am serbed," and Molly fled.

"Oh, good land! And I'm not dressed. What will Aunt Jane say!"

But Aunt Jane was not dressed either. She came

out of the Yellow Room where she had been talking to her brother, looking very severe and dignified. She apologized to Adelaide who came down the stairs shimmering in her white evening dress and casting an added air of shabbiness over her surroundings.

"You must excuse us to-night, my dear. We have had quite an excitement, with this sudden illness of my nephew. Usually we are not so careless."

CHAPTER XXXVI

MOLLY PREVARICATES

THE next morning at breakfast Molly and her grandfather faced each other down the length of the empty table. William had finished his meal and gone out to work. Jane was seeing after Robert, and Aunt Jane was breakfasting in her room. There was still half an hour before the guests were expected down.

Molly was uncomfortable. Conversation had to be made to-day, instead of delightfully making itself as it usually did between her and her grandfather. And it was exceedingly hard to make. Grandfather would not do anything but answer in monosyllables. If only he would speak out, say what was in his mind and scold her. But he wouldn't—not now nor ever again. She imagined the thing which was in his mind staying there forever and ever, hardening it against her and growing and growing till it became a barrier insurmountable to anything but the coldest courtesy and formality. She felt like crying.

"Molly!" Mr. Alloway made a motion with his hand.

She turned to Mom Clio. "Put the coffee down by the fire to keep warm, please, Clio,—and the toast, too, I guess. Thanks. I'll ring for you when we want anything."

The old woman shuffled out of the room. Mr. Alloway waited till the door had closed behind her.

"I had a talk with your Aunt Jane last evening, Molly."

"Yes, Grandfather."

"I have never cared to discuss my financial affairs with her, lest she should suppose that because her income, small as it is, suffices to keep her in greater comfort than mine does us, I had the intention of asking her assistance. On this occasion, however, I felt that it was imperative I should do so."

"Yes, Grandfather."

"I found myself obliged, in the course of our conversation, to mention the talk I had with you yesterday."

Molly said nothing.

"Your aunt suggested what seemed to me a possible explanation of what, I confess, I considered your quite unjustifiable stand about exhibiting your picture."

"What ——?"

"She drew my attention to the fact that though the picture is in a certain sense yours to do as you please with, yet in another sense it belongs to Miss Alden, whose likeness it is."

"Yes, it does."

"Then of course I understand your hesitation, my dear child, though why you should not wish to admit its cause, I do not understand. Your aunt tells me that you wrote to Miss Alden asking her formal permission to exhibit her portrait, and that she neglected

to answer your request in accepting your invitation to Alloway. She also tells me, however, that you considered it a matter of the purest formality, and had no doubt that she would do the same. In that case, it has probably slipped her mind, and I can see no reason why you should not ask her again."

"I did ask her yesterday, Grandfather."

"Before you spoke to me?"

"Yes. She said I had made her cruel looking, and that she could not bear to be held up to all the world like that.—But I didn't explain to her how very much it meant to us. I have been wondering all night whether I ought to ask her again."

"You ought not!"

"I'm quite sure she'd say yes, if I did, Grandfather. She was very sweet about it and she tried to take back everything she had said when she saw I was disappointed, though I didn't mean her to see."

"Under no conceivable circumstances does one ask a favor twice, Molly!"

At this moment the door opened and Adelaide herself came into the room. Mr. Alloway rose to greet her.

"Good-morning, Miss Adelaide. I hope you passed a good night. When your father used to be down here as a boy, I remember he found our nights so very good that he couldn't bear to come to the end of them. He was a sleepy head."

"He still insists there is no place in the world like this for sleeping. How's your brother this morning, Molly? I hope he's all right again."

"Yes, he's much better, thanks. He's going to get up and sit out on the Bricks later, but we want him to stay where he is till the morning mist clears away."

"Oh, the mist this morning!" exclaimed Adelaide. "It was the most beautiful thing I ever saw when I looked out of my window. It was liquid gold, flowing over everything. It put a glory on the landscape. Even the huts under the edge of the woods looked like tiny marble cabins."

Mr. Alloway smiled at her. "Ah ha! You see we have beauty down here, even if we are flat as a pancake. A horrid simile, don't you think so, Miss Adelaide? If it was your home wouldn't you rather people said 'flat as the ocean'?"

"I don't think it would make much difference. 'A rose' you know."

"'A rose,' certainly. But a pancake!"

Mr. Oliphant came into the room. "Good-morning, everybody. Am I late?" He was feeling for his glasses against his waistcoat. He screwed up his eyes tight when he first put them on, as though they strained them, then he blinked two or three times very fast and shook his head.

"One of the golden mornings, this morning. Beautiful! I don't know anything like it in the North. Were you up early enough to see it, Adelaide?"

"Yes, I was, and I did wish I had unpacked my sketch-box last night. I was crazy to paint it."

"A very difficult thing to do," said Mr. Oliphant. "I have tried it many times, myself, without success."

Molly, here, could do it, though. The feel of it is in her blood."

"Uncle Joe! I believe you have a deep laid scheme to make me hate Molly!"

Adelaide's voice had more feeling in it than she wanted to put there.

Mr. Oliphant wiggled his nose at her, crumbling his toast between his fingers. "I never heard such an idea, Adelaide! I want you and Molly to be the best of friends. You shouldn't take what I say about her work personally. I have explained to you time and again that Molly cannot be compared to either you or me. We have talent. She has genius."

"Job's comforter."

Molly laughed. "The conspiracy is to turn my head."

"Nothing of the sort. It's the simple truth. Do you suppose the Academy would adjourn its meeting for any hopeful young talent, however promising? That's an honor reserved for the Olympians. By the way, I hope your papers have gone, Molly. I should not advise even you to try their patience too far. They think mighty well of themselves, those fellows."

"I ——" began Molly, growing red.

Her grandfather took the words out of her mouth. "I know you will consider me hopelessly old-fashioned, Joe, but I simply cannot bring myself to apply these new-fangled notions of the advanced woman to my granddaughters. I have persuaded Molly not to show her picture."

Mr. Oliphant's face grew fiery, his mustache trem-

bled like the whiskers of an angry rabbit, his nose twitched rapidly. "Do you mean that, Bob?"

"Certainly, I mean it."

"Then all I can say is, and in spite of being your guest, I must say that you are a fool!"

"Say it, by all means, my dear fellow. I knew you would think it anyway."

"Think it? Why, Bob, you don't understand! You have totally failed to take in the significance of the thing. You're looking at it in a small way—as small as a beetle!"

"I don't agree with you."

"But you are, I tell you! 'New-fangled notions,' and 'advanced women.' All beside the point! Absolutely beside the point! This is a question of genius, I tell you. Try to take that in, Bob, genius. And genius knows no sex."

"Perhaps not. But it doesn't alter my opinion in the least."

"It should then! I never heard anything so ridiculous. What is your objection, I should like to know. She'll be famous in a month."

"I don't doubt it, Joe. I trust your judgment in the matter absolutely. But then I don't consider fame a becoming mantle for a lady."

"Why not? In the name of Heaven, why not?"

"I don't fancy her name cheapened by bandying from mouth to mouth."

"Robert Alloway! You exasperate me beyond words! You have such a complete misapprehension of the thing! Was George Eliot's name cheapened by

bandying, I should like to know? You're dealing with great things. You must look back to great precedents."

Mr. Alloway smiled. "Wasn't that an unfortunately chosen precedent, Joe? It doesn't seem to prove your point."

"Perhaps it doesn't. I never was an expert in words. I'm not up to a bout with you. But I know what I know, and I'm not a fool, thank God." He got up and stood with his back to the fire, twisting his hands together nervously under his coat tails. "You don't realize the significance of this thing. You can't, or it would be impossible that you should speak the way you do. Do you realize what you are doing, sitting there like a tyrant, juggling with lives? That's what you're doing, Robert, juggling with lives! It's Molly's life. This is the turning point in her career. This is her chance, and no chance knocks twice. Oh, I know what you are going to say, she'll get plenty of other chances, but I tell you a chance gone is a chance gone, and other chances are as uncertain as the future. And if they came you wouldn't let her take them!"

Molly put her word in. "Oh, yes, he would, Uncle Joe."

"What makes you say that?" Mr. Oliphant turned on her almost fiercely. His whole face was working. He made little growling sounds at the end of his sentences. "Fame isn't going to be any more becoming a mantle in your grandfather's estimation a year from now than it is to-day, is it?"

"Yes, indeed, it is," said Molly, laughing. "Give

him time to get used to it and he'll think it's the loveliest mantle I've ever worn. He's always like that about new clothes, you know."

"If you want to make a joke of it, Molly."

"What else can I make?"

"A point, that's what I'd make. How old are you, anyway? Twenty-one? I shouldn't care what an old fossil said!"

"Honestly, Uncle Joe! To call my granddad a fossil to his face."

Mr. Oliphant turned his back to the whole table. "All right, I beg his pardon. But he is one just the same."

Mr. Alloway got up and stood beside him, laying his hand on the mantel shelf. "There isn't any need for you to beg my pardon, Joe. You couldn't make me angry no matter what you said, because I know it's interest in Molly that prompts it all. But believe me, I know best."

"You're a fool!" said Mr. Oliphant.

Adelaide pushed her chair back.

"Let's go out, Molly," she said.

Molly followed her on to the Bricks. "Would you like to go for a walk?" she asked.

"No, let's stay here. I want to talk to you. I want to take it all back. You must show the picture. You must. Please, Molly. It's kept me awake all night, thinking about it."

"Adelaide, how silly. When what you said didn't make any difference anyhow."

"Why didn't it?"

"You heard what Grandfather said."

"Wasn't that just an excuse?"

"Adelaide, my dear girl, you mayn't realize it yet, but the train carried you back fifty years when it brought you here from New York. We live 'before the war' down here."

"Then you wouldn't have shown it anyhow?"

Molly lied as smoothly as though it were a daily habit. "No," she said.

CHAPTER XXXVII

GREAT-AUNT JANE IS INDISCREET

THE beams of the low sun streamed across the Bricks, and bending at the house, climbed up the wall nearly to the windows of the Yellow Room. The shadow of the square columns striped the pavement sharply dark and light. In one of the shadows Mary Carmichael sat recovering from the sleeping-car, and knitting. In the next young Jane, her susceptible sixteen-year-old heart completely "crushed" after half an hour's contemplation of that young lady, sat hemming towels, under the eye of her new idol, with a perseverance and speed which were quite unprecedented.

Mr. Oliphant and Molly were painting in the big field in front of the house, under the oak tree, in the shadow which lay as dark and clear on the vivid green of the young oats, as a reflection on still water.

Adelaide had asked to be taken to Four Oaks to send a telegram, and Robert, recovered enough for mild activity, had driven her over in the car.

William was out farming.

Allen was a prisoner to Aunt Jane in the Yellow Room. She had detained him there after dinner.

"Come," she said, "it's your turn now. I want to feel I really know all of Molly's new friends. Yester-

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day Adelaide and I had a long talk. I hope she enjoyed it as much as I did. To-morrow, if Miss Mary consents, I am looking forward to one with her. Am I a great bore?"

"You are not."

She laughed, a laugh discreetly too low to become a cackle, as there had been danger of its doing for the last few years.

"I like men to flatter ladies, no matter how old they are. But one has been young, you know, and one really knows. Now tell me, was your mother that charming Miss Meredith who came from England, it must have been about '55 or '56, and wrought such havoc among the hearts at Newport?"

"She did come from England at about that time, and she was certainly very charming."

"I have no doubt it is she I remember. She was very small and dainty, with golden hair that curled adorably, and the sweetest, most mischievous blue eyes imaginable. We ladies hated her as much as our beaux loved her, which was the most unfeigned tribute we could possibly have paid her. That, of course, was before she decided which one of her numerous admirers she would accept; after that we dared to love her, too. At the end she accepted a man I never had the pleasure of meeting. I remember how curious I was about your father and how much I wondered if he was worthy of her. Everyone told me he was the ideal match for her, which was saying a great deal. But I never did have the pleasure of meeting him. So you are their son! Dear, dear, the world is a very small

place, isn't it? To think of it, after all these years."

"It is small."

"At least in the upper strata,—like a pyramid,—with its uncounted millions at the bottom. But you have found out for yourself how small the world is, I understand. Molly tells me you are a great traveler. You have been around it three or four times, haven't you?"

"Not quite! I went abroad after my father died, and then when my mother died I stayed on. I was in Africa exploring, and you can't imagine what a hold it gets on you. You always want one more day, or one more week, or one more month, to get somewhere and see what's there, and then you hear of another place, and you've simply got to get there."

"I can imagine it must be fascinating, if there is nothing to bring you home. Very difficult to tear yourself away from. How long were you there?"

"Nearly four years."

"You were a very fortunate young man, I consider, to have so free a foot. Most people have somebody or something, to call them home."

"Yes, I was fortunate."

"I'm an impertinent old lady, but you must forgive me. Age must be allowed its compensations, you know, or it would be quite intolerable. One of them is the privilege of giving perfectly free expression to its preferences and curiosity. I tell you quite frankly, young gentleman, that I like you very much. And I want to know all about you. As I said to Adelaide

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yesterday, I think Molly has exceptionally good taste in her friends."

Allen laughed. "I'm glad you approve of us. Ask any questions you like. My life is an open book for you to read. There are no black secrets concealed among its pages."

Aunt Jane had a way of tipping her head to one side which made her look like an inquisitive bird.

"No pages glued together?" she asked.

"None at all."

"What an exemplary young man! I wish I could say as much."

Allen laughed outright.

Aunt Jane waited till he had stopped laughing. "I'm glad I amuse you," she said.

"I think you are one of the most delightful ladies I ever met," he answered.

"I am exceedingly pleased to hear it, because I consider you one of the most delightful young gentlemen I have ever met—at least since I was young myself, before the war,—and since then, I must admit my circle of friends has been strictly limited."

Allen chuckled. "What was the impertinent question?" he asked. "I am impatient to hear it."

"Why—I was wondering whether you really were as free as you say, or only chose to consider yourself so."

"No, I was free all right."

"How about your sister? Didn't she need you?"

"No, she didn't need me. Though I must admit I did feel rather uncomfortable once in a while when I

thought of her. I'm afraid she had a pretty lonely time of it after Mother died. I guess I ought to have come home."

"And wasn't there anybody else?"

"No."

Aunt Jane was silent, looking at the fire and twisting her stick over and over on the arms of her chair. It was obvious she was thinking hard. Allen wondered what was coming next. She had dropped her bantering manner when she turned to him again.

"I wonder how sincere you think I am, and how much of a 'fake' as the boys say."

"I don't think you're a fake at all. What a question to ask!"

"No, I'm not—that is not always, though I can do it very nicely when I want to. But I'm sincere when I say I want Molly's friends to be mine,—and also that I like you for yourself, young gentleman."

"I know you are, and I am very much flattered."

"Jane, my young niece, says I am an indiscreet old lady. But I am seldom indiscreet accidentally."

"I could forgive a certain amount of indiscretion, I believe." Allen was thoroughly enjoying himself.

"Yes. But I'm wondering if Molly could. You have no idea how high those children value confidences."

Allen grew serious. "I don't believe I should be indiscreet with Miss Molly's confidences, if I were you," he said.

"No? But the point is, you see, that it isn't a con-

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fidence about herself. It's about you. And I have already confessed to curiosity."

Allen chuckled again. "I'm afraid I can't help you decide. But—if you're sure it's all about me and not a bit about herself, I'll confess to curiosity too."

"Well, don't tell then, will you? She swore me to secrecy. She told me you were engaged."

"I?"

"Yes."

There was a silence so long that Aunt Jane began to wonder whether she would have to break it herself.

"What did she say about it?"

"About it? Nothing. She simply said it. Of course she was pleased, but she did seem a little hurt that neither you nor Adelaide had told her. She said she was afraid you didn't think of her as being as close a friend as she thought of both of you."

"That's nonsense, Miss Alloway! How did she hear it?"

"Mr. Oliphant told her."

"Mr. ——" Allen stopped.

"However, as I told Molly, your not telling her had no significance. People know their own business best. And there may well be excellent reasons why one should not speak of an engagement even to an intimate friend. But now remember! You said you would forgive a certain amount of indiscretion, and the object of this indiscretion was to try to reconcile your statement that you were perfectly free to stay away four years, with the fact that all the time you were engaged, and one of the sweetest little fiancées imag-

nable was waiting for you at home. I am an old lady with a perfectly insatiable taste for romance, and I suspect one. A ——"

"I'm sorry to disappoint you but there wasn't any romance. I was not engaged."

"Oh! Molly was so sure it was an old standing engagement. I think she told me Mr. Oliphant said so, —or perhaps what she said was that it couldn't have happened this winter without her knowing."

"No, it couldn't."

"What's that? Do you mean to say you're not engaged? Why didn't you say so at once? I never saw such an exasperating man!"

Allen got up and walked to the window. He lifted the curtain to look out, but encountering Jane's squirrel eyes shining up at him from the Bricks, he let it fall again and came back.

He stopped in front of Molly's two pictures and stood staring up at them.

"She is wonderful!" he muttered. "She is wonderful."

Aunt Jane heard that he was saying something, but she did not ask him what. She kept her eyes turned to the fire, not looking at him.

He came toward her, with a sudden turn and a quick step. He drew his chair up close and sat down.

"Miss Alloway," he said gravely, "you asked me a little while ago whether I believed you were sincere. You were half joking then. Seriously, are you sincere?"

Aunt Jane looked at him, meeting his eye squarely.

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"I am sincere."

Allen held her eyes as though trying to read the thoughts they veiled. He turned away with a sigh.

"Miss Alloway, Molly has talked a great deal about you during the winter. What she has said has left a picture in my mind of a sure rock, never to be shaken nor moved, standing always firm to all that is honorable and true and lasting."

Aunt Jane said very low, "Dear Molly!"

"I was a boy when I went away, Miss Alloway. I had never lived or thought for myself, or even learned to try to form my own judgments. My father had just died, my mother died while I was away. In Africa I lived a life of outdoor adventure. I learned to trust myself in the wilds, and to have others rely on me in the dangers which the wilds bring. I grew in that sense to be a man. But in many ways I came home as much a boy as I went away. Mary and I are very close to one another. I don't see how brother and sister could be closer. She can come to me, and I can go to her, with absolute certainty that all that the other has, or is, is at our disposal. But, Miss Alloway, there are things which young people have not got to give, and for those things, Mary and I have no one to turn to."

Aunt Jane laid her hand on his arm. "My boy, I am a very old lady. And I have lived a fuller life than outwardly you might suppose. I have never had a family of my own, but I have brought up two generations of my brother's family. They have all come to me, four boys and three girls, for the things you speak

of, the things only an older person can give,—and I think they have not gone away lacking. Certainly they have gone lacking for nothing I had to give them. I am sincere, Allen. I can say only that to you.”

“All right. About this engagement. When we were kids, Adelaide and I, our parents wanted us to be engaged, and we grew up with the idea that of course we would be. And then when we were grown up we liked each other, and we were. And then ——” He told the whole story from beginning to end. “And then when I came home I didn’t know where we stood. I thought when we saw each other again we would know what we wanted. And then Molly came,—and I knew what I wanted. But Adelaide, I don’t know how she felt. I haven’t dared ask her. But that evening on the pond at home—I don’t want her to want that,—and I left the next morning. I sneaked away in the dawn like a thief. But that old doctor. He’s been around telling everybody about it. And they’ve been writing to me congratulating me, and I think they’ve been writing to her. I haven’t answered the letters. I don’t know what to say, and I don’t know what she has said.”

“You haven’t dared ask her, Allen. Does that mean you think she has a right to expect you to ask her?”

“Well—I don’t know.—We were such kids, does it matter what we said then?”

“What would she say now if you did ask her?”

“I don’t know.”

“If you are afraid to ask her, it must be that you think you do know.”

Allen said nothing.

Aunt Jane was very thoughtful for a long time before she spoke again. "I suppose you have told me this because you want to know what old age thinks youth ought to do in such circumstances?"

"Yes."

"I think you ought to ask her."

Allen sprang up. "But, Miss Alloway! Molly!"

"Do you think I am likely to forget Molly? She told you I stood firm by all that was honorable and true."

"But, Miss Alloway ——"

"No. No. There is nothing to say. Yes, there is this. If you don't ask her, Molly will have to know, and then ——"

Aunt Jane rose. She stooped as she passed Allen. "You poor boy," she said. "Youth is very hard."

CHAPTER XXXVIII

THE OLD SLAVE BURYING GROUND

THE Yellow Room had a very cheerful look with the long curtains drawn over the windows and the fire of light-wood blazing up the chimney. With Molly's pictures hiding the faded spots on the wall and a fine embroidered cover over the deal table, and the big party filling it with talk and laughter, it was so like old times, before the war, that Aunt Jane felt quite rejuvenated. She put her worries behind her, as a good hostess should, and gave all her attention to the entertainment of Mr. Oliphant who was sitting beside her. But she kept an eye open at the same time on the doings and groupings of the young people.

Under the lamp in the corner the two Carmichaels and Robert and Jane were playing Canfield, while Adelaide and William and Molly sat round the centre table looking through a portfolio of Molly's sketches. Mr. Oliphant kept his back obstinately turned to them; since morning he had washed his artistic hands of Molly, but in spite of him his eyes wandered round occasionally, and when Adelaide spoke words of particularly warm praise Aunt Jane lost his attention.

"What is this one, Molly? How did you do it? With chalk on dark paper?"

"Yes, and a touch or two of charcoal. Don't you

think it's effective? It's moonlight, you see, and the negroes' faces don't light up."

"I think it's wonderfully effective."

"Let's see. Which is it?" William leaned down to look over Adelaide's shoulder. "Oh, that thing. I remember when you did that. It was Juno's burying, wasn't it?"

"No, Cleopatra's. Do you remember how scared they all were at having it at night? I don't remember what delayed them so that it had to be."

Jane twisted round in her chair.

"I don't wonder they were scared. I never saw anything so spooky as that was in my life. And Molly's picture is perfectly grand, I think."

Mr. Oliphant could contain himself no longer. "Let me see," he said, turning round and reaching out his hand for the sketch. "Excellent, most excellent. I like the way you have handled your medium. It has the feel of a Mezzotint. Some time or other you must try some plates. You could do very fine etchings——" He stopped abruptly. "However, you will, of course, do exactly as you like about it."

"Pass it over, Molly, and let us see it." The Canfield players were losing interest in their game.

"Gracious! You have a taste for spooks."

"You must remember they're indigenous in this part of the country, and so is Molly."

"Are you going to show us any while we're here?"

"You shouldn't joke about them," Jane remonstrated.

"Do you think there are any around where they'll hear us?"

"No, really!" Jane insisted.

The room, though very cozy and bright, was getting stifling hot. Allen Carmichael thought longingly of the cool, still moonlight outside the thick curtains.

"Let's go look for them now," he suggested. "It's just such a night as in the picture."

"My gracious!" exclaimed Jane.

"Would you like to?" asked Molly. "Who wants to go spook hunting?"

"Let's all go."

"I won't. I think it's silly." Jane's eyes were very big.

Mary Carmichael put her arms around her. "Come along, little one, and take care of me."

"Where are we going?"

"I remember when I was young, before the war," said Aunt Jane, "we used to go down the avenue under the oaks on moonlight nights, to see the shadows come waving through the moss. It had a very beautiful effect."

"But that's right beside the negro graveyard!"

"Once I remember actually going in there. You were with us, I think, Joe. Do you remember?"

"Yes, I do." Mr. Oliphant did not sound in a thoroughly good temper.

"Well, I'm not going in there, anyhow," said Jane.

"Oh, yes, you are, Janey." Mary drew her out of the room, and the others followed. Aunt Jane watched them go.

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"Young people are very attractive to have about," she said.

"They are very noisy to have about," grumbled her brother. "But they are an attractive set. I like the friends you chose for Molly, Joe."

"I'm glad you like something," said Mr. Oliphant, getting up and going to the table on which Molly's sketches lay scattered.

The yard was very peaceful in the still evening. Only a soft contented lowing from the cattle shed and the sudden indignant cackling of sleepy geese, now and then, broke the silence. There was a light mist over everything, gray and shining in the moonlight, dark and dead in the shadows. From the black doorway of Mom Clio's cabin, close outside the gate, a red spark rose and fell as the old woman puffed at her pipe. Inside her daughter Hannah was crooning to her baby, come home for the night from her foster mother.

*"Ludi ludi, ludi loo,
Ludi ludi loo-o,
Ludi ludi, ludi loo,
Ludi ludi loo-o,"*

with a downward moaning slur on the last syllable.

The arch of the oaks was like a tunnel; passing under them was like passing under a roof. Not a flicker of the gray light which flooded the fields outside penetrated their interlaced, moss-hung branches. Jane pressed closer still to Mary.

"Here's the path, William. You've gone by it," Robert turned into the woods.

"Are we really going in there?" cried Jane. "I heard something!"

"No you didn't," whispered Mary reassuringly.

In the woods more light came through the branches. Little patches of it shone on the gray trunks of the trees and the stiff spikes of the Spanish-bayonets and on a palmetto here and there.

"Here we are," said Robert, stopping.

"Where are we?" asked Mary.

"In the graveyard."

"Don't you hear something?" asked Jane.

"No." But in spite of herself she thought she did. "I don't see the graves. Aren't they marked?"

"Only by broken tumblers and things. You couldn't expect a tombstone for every slave, could you?"

The ground was uneven under foot, like a badly ploughed field, and little pieces of broken crockery caught the light and glistened among the fallen leaves.

"There's one stone," said Molly. "Over this way. Here it is. It's Grandmother's maid. Flash your light, William. 'Here sleeps Matilda, my faithful servant.'"

"I do hear something!" Jane's voice was a wail.

Everyone heard it now. As though the flash of light had been a signal to bedlam, silence fled. The woods were full of noise, groaning and crashing, and gray things moving. Jane abandoned Mary and clung to Robert.

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"Good Lord!"

Somebody screamed.

The gray things vanished; the noise died away in the distance.

"What was it? Oh, what was it?" Jane was sobbing against her brother's arm.

"Stop it, little one. Didn't you see what it was? It was razorbacks."

"I don't care. Let's go home. Do let's go home."

"Come along."

Stepping over the ditch onto the avenue again Allen Carmichael held out his hand to the girl behind him.

"Which of you is it?" he asked. "I can't see."

"It's Molly Alloway. Wait a minute, I'm caught." Her skirt was entangled in a branch of Christmas Vine. By the time Allen succeeded in freeing it the others were some distance ahead of them.

"Thanks," said Molly. "Wasn't it funny,—those pigs? I don't mind admitting they scared me. You know there isn't a negro on the place would go in there at night for anything in the world. You know old Mom Clio? She 'sees things,' and she collects ghost stories. I get most of mine from her. She told me to-day that Hannah's husband was walking up the avenue here the other evening about sunset, and one of the boys from over Pimlico way came out of the woods and joined him. They walked along together talking plantation gossip till they came to the edge of the wood, and then the boy said good-bye and turned back. And Hannah's husband suddenly remembered he had died two weeks ago."

Allen laughed. "It doesn't sound impossible down here. It's the land of enchantment."

"How do you like it? As well as you expected?"

"I suppose newcomers are asked that in Heaven, aren't they?" Allen caught himself up abruptly.

"Is that a comparison?" asked Molly, laughing.

The rest of the party were clear of the oaks, plainly visible in the moonlight.

"Hi there! Don't leave us alone in the dark," called Allen.

Molly walked faster.

"Well, dead people seem to walk around very casually." Allen's answer fell very flat.

They went on in silence. By the edge of the moonlight Adelaide and William were waiting for them.

"Scared in there?"

"I got more thrill than I expected," admitted Allen.

Molly caught William's arm. "Whose pigs were those, William? I thought all ours were over by the river. If somebody else has let a herd in, we ought ——" she hurried him along.

Aunt Jane was waiting for them by the horse-block outside the back kitchen. "Are you all here?" she asked. "Where are Allen and Adelaide?"

Molly looked back. "They're coming along. We left them at the edge of the oaks. They can't get lost between there and here. Don't let's wait for them."

"I want to be sure they close the gate," said Aunt Jane.

"I'll see to that," said William.

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Aunt Jane stood for a minute at the foot of the stairs.

"Molly," she said, "you will be sure Mary has all she wants in her room."

"Yes, I will, Aunt Jane."

"Afterward come to my room."

She was standing in her window looking out when Molly came. "They have just come in," she said. "I heard Adelaide laughing at the gate. She sounded very happy. Did Mary have enough blankets?"

"Plenty."

"All this has brought back the old days, before the war, so clearly. I suppose it is natural."

"Poor Aunt Jane!"

"Not at all, my dear child. Every dog has his day. And mine was quite a brilliant day while it lasted."

"It must have been a lovely day."

"I have been thinking so much of my dear mother. She was the loveliest person. So bright and full of spirits—and talk—and laughter. We used to have a beautiful time together. And she was so wise, and she knew so much. She brought me up on quotations. Her whole conversation was full of them. 'Be ye wise as serpents and harmless as doves.' 'Those friends thou hast and their adoption tried——' I remember she used to tell us you had to know a person at least a summer and a winter before you could consider you knew him at all. And then—looking back I believe I must have been a very attractive girl, though I didn't think so at the time. I imagine I had what would be considered a good deal of attention.

And I remember she used to say 'When a man asks a girl to marry him, then it's time enough for her to begin to consider how well she likes him.' I'm getting to be a garrulous old lady, Molly dear. It's time for you to go to bed. Come! Off with you, or you'll never be up in the morning."

CHAPTER XXXIX

ARE THINGS THE SAME?

UNDER the overhanging shadow of the last oak Allen stopped.

"Wait a minute, Adelaide. I've got some burrs caught on my ankle. Ouch! I can't get them off."

"Hurry up. They're almost out of sight."

"Never mind. It's a straight road. We can't get lost."

"No, but ——"

"Think we might meet some of Miss Molly's spooks? I've lost faith in them—they're only pigs!"

"I don't care if they are. They scared me all right. And there's no use in my trying to deny it. I screamed—twice."

"Did you? I didn't hear your particular shriek to recognize it. It's queer this mistiness on a perfectly clear night like this, isn't it? It only seems to rise fifteen or twenty feet off the ground. Above that see how bright the moonlight looks."

"It's awfully damp. Hurry up, Allen. If you can't get them off, leave them. Last night the moisture was dripping off the eaves of the house as though it was raining. Molly said it was quite usual. I don't think I should like it for long, do you?"

"There! They were sticking straight into me. I shouldn't suppose it was healthy. But it seems to be."

They walked on, Adelaide pulling ahead, Allen holding irresolutely back. They were silent for some time. Allen tripped on a root and stumbled. "Darn this mist! You have to give your whole attention to where you put your feet."

"Well, you're quite free to, you know."

"Oh, don't, Adelaide. I'm trying to think. Stand still a minute."

"I'm cold. I don't want to stand still."

"Please, Adelaide." Desperately he wanted to think. It must be done! It must be done! He had known from the beginning that it must be done. But afterward—— No use in thinking. Go blindly since it must be done.

Adelaide stopped. She was like a veiled figure, white in the mist. She knew what was coming, and she, too, wanted to think. But there was no use. All day she had been thinking, thinking, and all the night before, without respite or conclusion, and now her brain was numb and refused to think. She had become a primitive creature, all feeling and no reason,—all triumph, too. Yet down deep something else stirred, a blind fear behind her triumph. It made her want to run. She turned away.

"Adelaide! Please."

She stopped again.

Allen was silent a few seconds, getting his voice in control and seeking his words. If it must be done it must be done well.

"I've been home six months now, Adelaide. That's time enough for us to have come to know each other

again, isn't it, and to know whether things are to go on as they were?"

"It ought to be time enough, Allen."

"Well, then, Adelaide?"

"Well, Allen?"

"Are things the same?" He took a step nearer to her. Out of the mistiness her blue eyes shone like two stars, looking up at him. The silver moonlight caught in her hair and made a halo of it. She looked unearthly beautiful,—unearthly beautiful, the way she used to look, half seen, in dreams. He heard himself repeat the question, "Aren't things the same?" And the tone of his voice had a different sound. He caught himself up quickly. Yet if it had to be done the better he did it the better it was!

"Are things the same?" The question buzzed in her head, like a long-drawn organ note that hurts. Are they? Are they? Looking up at him with those starry eyes into his eyes she felt dizzy as though she were looking into a chasm. And then the question came again. And the ring in the voice had changed. She held herself in, rigid. And then, suddenly, as though something had broken, she fell forward sobbing.

"Adelaide! Adelaide! Don't! Please, Adelaide. It's all right, little girl."

She felt his hand on her hair. He was holding her up, otherwise she would have fallen. She sobbed and sobbed. Oh, the relief, the strain loosened after so many weeks.

"Oh, don't stop me! Please. Let me." His hand

went over and over her hair. Her face was crushed against his coat. The sobbing ceased for lack of breath. It grew less and less, like a child's sobbing, crying itself to sleep. She raised her face and looked at him, the starry eyes half-blinded, a half-shy smile on her lips—wonderfully beautiful.

Was it her voice that said it, or his or a thought merely? It seemed to sound in the air between them, low and whispered. "Molly."

She felt him stiffen, like a string drawn taut. His eyes ceased to be deep and dizzy.

She too stiffened—back to the accustomed strain.

"That was a very silly performance, wasn't it, Allen? I'm not sure that I think there was much use in bringing this up, but since you have, we'd better talk it out. I suppose we ought to anyhow, so there may be no *arrière-pensées*."

"We've said all we need, now, haven't we? All about the past. We can look forward now, Adelaide."

"No. Let's sit down. There's a log." She crossed to the side of the road. "Is it really six months since you came home?"

"Yes."

"It seems, in some ways, like six years. Allen, I'm going to talk to you. Things are the same that far, that I can tell you things I would never dream of telling anybody else."

"I ——"

"No. Wait, Allen. You must let me talk first. Then you can talk if you want to."

It was a few seconds before she began; like Allen,

she had to control her voice and seek her words. "You don't know how I longed for you to come home, at first, Allen. When you went away I felt you had gone for a lifetime and I was terribly unhappy. But at the same time I was happy, too, in a way, because you were you, wherever you were, you were you and I was I. I'm not good at explaining, but you understand, I think. You must have felt it, too, at first—we had been you and I so long. And then, little by little, the unhappiness began to fade. The world seemed a very good place, and you were in it, somewhere, and you were coming back, sometime. And the time was coming sooner and sooner every day. And Mamma and Papa took a lot of trouble to give me a good time, and I began to take a real interest in the painting. And then—about then—I began to think I didn't want you to come home too soon. I wanted to become a real artist before then. But when your mother died, I thought, of course, you would come, and when you didn't I was hurt. I was more hurt than I had ever been in my life before—or than I hope I ever will be again." Her voice sank low. "And there's only one sort of salve for that kind of hurt, Allen,—that's pride. I told myself I wouldn't care, that I didn't care, when you came home, or whether you came at all. And suddenly I realized perhaps you might not come; our engagement had been broken before you left. I'd never thought of that before seriously, I'd only thought of it as words that couldn't count between you and me. I was frightened at first, but I told myself I didn't care. And then—I

don't know whether it was the hurt that was so bad it killed something, or the pride that killed it—the painting helped. Anyhow I began really not to care so much—I cared less and less as I came more and more to care for the painting, till you actually came. Then pride went back on me. It took the other side. Everyone seemed to take it for granted things would be as they had been—Mamma and Papa did, and Mary and Uncle Joe, quite openly, and other people in hints—like Dr. Bell, and pride said they must be. If it hadn't been for pride—I don't know—but then Molly came.”

Allen stirred.

“Don't worry. I'm not going to say anything horrid about Molly. Molly's lovely. But she came, that's all. One thing I had counted on surely, and that was that we would talk things over, you and I. But Molly came and you didn't dare and that hurt again. Then pride took refuge in the painting. But Molly drove it out of there too. You know I liked Molly at first—partly, I think, because she didn't know about you, and she never hinted to try to find things out, as other people did. I like her still, when I can think of her apart from you and the painting. Molly's lovely. That's why I came down here. I knew she had found out about you when she left the city. And I never thought of your coming here. I thought I'd be safe; I thought of it as a sort of refuge. Why did she leave if you were to come? I felt as though I had been trapped when I heard you were coming. And then the painting. . . . But I don't know why I should

tell you that. Only, I had a taste of the inferno last night, about the painting, and I don't care for any more of it. And so things are not as they were."

She jumped up and sprang down the road before he could stop her.

"Come back, Adelaide," he called. "You said you would let me speak."

"I've changed my mind."

He put his hand on her arm.

"Don't touch me."

She stopped abruptly. "There's one thing though, Allen Carmichael. I'm glad we did speak. I'm glad you know the other thing died when you didn't come back when you could. And there's only been pride left. And now it's pride that lets you go. You ought to be grateful. I wonder if you will be, you and Molly. Who made you do it, anyway, did she?"

"No."

"Did you do it yourself?"

The mist could not quite hide his flush. "No."

"Mary? She couldn't!"

"No."

"Then who? Who have you been talking to? You ——"

"Old Miss Jane."

"What!" She went on quickly. "They're too much for me," she said as they reached the gate. "They're quite beyond me, the Acts of Molly's Ancestors. Is a great-aunt an Ancestor?"

Aunt Jane in her window heard a clear laugh ring through the mist. It was what Adelaide wished.

CHAPTER XL

GREAT-AUNT JANE ADMITS SHE DESERVED IT

"IF there is one thing I dislike more than another it is the remains of breakfast," said Aunt Jane, pushing her chair back. "Shall we go into the Yellow Room?"

A habit of twenty years had been broken by her appearance at the table that morning. Such habits do not break easily, and young Jane was filled with speculation. She was developing a new impression of Aunt Jane. Last night in the privacy of their room she had admitted it to Molly. She suspected that Aunt Jane had some game up her sleeve, but just what it was she did not know. Did Molly? Molly, lying wide-eyed in the darkness, staring at the square of half light which was the open window, said she did not.

Every minute and every movement made young Jane surer of it; the way Aunt Jane looked from person to person with searching eyes, watching and wary under their smile; the way pauses came and were hastily filled; the feeling of strain behind all the jokes and the laughter. It was intensely interesting. She left the table with the others and followed them, unobtrusively, so as not to draw Aunt Jane's attention. But Aunt Jane saw her nevertheless. She stopped in

the doorway and looked back at her in a way which sent her niece hurrying into the kitchen lest words follow glances. She didn't intend to be ordered around like a neglectful child who had to be told her business! She hummed a tune as she went, to hide her discomfiture. Molly followed her.

Mary Carmichael and Robert and William stopped in the hall to admire the stags' heads. Mr. Oliphant and Mr. Alloway stood up while the ladies left the room and then sat down again by the fire in the dining-room and fell back into discussion.

Only Adelaide and Allen followed Aunt Jane into the Yellow Room. Allen turned back immediately to go out when he saw the others were not coming, but Adelaide put out her hand and stopped him. They stood facing each other on either side of the door and Aunt Jane looked from one to the other questioningly. She remembered the laugh she had heard ring through the mist the night before, but she could see no sign of it now on either of their faces.

Adelaide turned away from Allen suddenly, to her hostess. There was certainly no sign of laughter on her face, though her lips curled and her eyes shone.

"I give you back your gift," she said. "Molly can have him!"

It was done in a flash. The door closed behind her and she was gone.

In the Yellow Room she left consternation behind her, as though the flash had been lightning. The blood rushed to Aunt Jane's old cheeks, higher and higher, till they burned and her eyes felt hot and full. She

panted a little. Allen flushed, looking at her anxiously, for fear her anger might overcome her. But she relaxed suddenly. A rather shamefaced smile spread over her face and she sat down on the nearest chair.

"I'm afraid I deserved that," she said. "I really did! No! You don't know how much I deserved it. So you did it, did you?"

"Yes."

"I knew you had, last night. But her laugh misled me. That laugh was very well done. I admire Adelaide. I feel very much like kissing you, Allen Carmichael." She raised her hand as he leaned down. "No. I'll wait. I never have kissed anyone who wasn't in the family, and I won't break my record in my old age." She jumped up quickly, steadying herself a moment before she let go of the arm of her chair. "But I must go look after that poor child! She was badly hurt before she struck like that."

She hesitated for a minute outside Adelaide's door before knocking.

Adelaide did not say "Come in." She opened the door herself a little way, and stood with her hand on the knob, uninvitingly.

Aunt Jane laid her hand on her arm.

"Don't hate me, Adelaide. You think I have been playing to steal your happiness, but I haven't. It would have been quite useless if I had. It is not one of the things which can be stolen. You say you are giving him to Molly, but you're not, my child. He wasn't yours to give, or you couldn't have given him if you had tried. A husk would not have brought you

happiness, and I have had that in mind too, my dear. Is it too much for you to believe? I should like you to call me aunt, if you will."

She tried to draw her face down and kiss her, but Adelaide pulled away from her, her lips lifting in a cynical smile, her hand still on the door-knob.

Aunt Jane sighed as she stepped back and the door closed. Then she went down-stairs again to the kitchen.

"Molly, where are you? I don't want you here. Jane and I can take care of the housekeeping. Go entertain your guests. Adelaide has gone to her room. I think she has a headache."

"I'll go see if I can do anything for her."

"I have just come from there, and she appears to prefer being alone."

"I don't believe she's got a headache," said Jane. "I believe she and Allen have had a quarrel and she's sulking."

Aunt Jane frowned at her. "I see nothing to justify you in such a supposition, Jane."

"It's the only possible explanation of the way they behave. Otherwise, why aren't they off together? I never saw such a funny engaged couple."

"You never saw any, did you?" asked Aunt Jane.

"Well, I've read about plenty, anyway."

"Too many, I should say. But as it happens they are not engaged."

Molly stopped as she was going through the doorway. "What's that?"

"I said they are not engaged."

"But, Aunt Jane, I'm sure they are. Uncle Joe told me so."

"I imagine they know best. And they have told me they are not."

"Then what were they doing last evening?"

"You might ask them," suggested Aunt Jane. She said it in a voice which had the ring of dismissal and Molly went.

In the dining-room the two old gentlemen were still arguing hotly.

"Where's everybody?" asked Molly.

"I don't know. Your Uncle Joe and I are in the midst of an important discussion. Don't interrupt us, Molly."

At that instant another interruption brought them to their feet.

CHAPTER XLI

TEL'GRAM!

THE yard was in commotion. A negro boy on a mule was plunging down the road, kicking his mount with his bare heels and whacking his ribs with a stick. "Tel'gram! Tel'gram!" he was shouting. "Ah got tel'gram!" And everyone within hearing took up the cry. The piccaninnies jumped up and down, clapping their hands. The dogs barked.

Young Jane came round the corner of the house like a whirlwind. Aunt Jane appeared at the door of the kitchen and Adelaide stuck her head out of an upper window. Molly and the two old gentlemen hurried out from the dining-room.

"What is it? What is it?" demanded Mr. Oliphant, looking as though he expected a dog fight. The telegram was for him. "Is that all?" he exclaimed. It was like a douche of cold water on all the excitement. A telegram was something at Alloway. But after he had opened it even young Jane could find nothing to complain of in his manner.

"What's this?" he cried. "Who's going to tell me what this means, I should like to know? Does Molly think she can make game of me and the Academy and the whole art world! I tell you not even Velasquez would have dared to do what she has done. Not Sargent, not Chase, not Whistler, not I, not ——"

"What has she done?" interrupted Aunt Jane.

"What has she done!" repeated Mr. Oliphant. "Listen to this, if you want to know what she has done."

"We shall be glad to listen," said Aunt Jane. "Let us go into the Yellow Room."

Mr. Oliphant readjusted his glasses, which had fallen off in the excitement, and read:

" 'Please explain ——'

"It's a night-letter from Smith-Jones, and how can I explain, I should like to know?"

" 'Letter received from Miss Alloway withdrawing Studio Study, also telegram from same place—date Four Oaks, S. C., signed Marjorie Nedla withdrawing "Sarah." Committee much incensed. Public already interested in canvases. Something must be done if unfavorable comment is to be avoided. Is Miss Alloway Marjorie Nedla? Wire answer.' "

"Is she? That's what I want to know. Does she think she's Michael Angelo? Does ——"

Mr. Alloway interrupted him. "I don't see any reason to suppose that Molly is Marjorie Nedla."

Mr. Oliphant was almost too indignant to speak intelligibly. His face worked, his fingers twitched, his words came in jerks.

"You don't see!" he exclaimed. "You don't see anything, Robert Alloway! It's self-evident. Who else could she be?"

Adelaide had come down-stairs and was standing in the doorway.

"She might be I, Uncle Joe, you know."

He turned on her fiercely. "You? You? Are you making game of me, too? You ought to be ashamed of yourselves! I wash my hands of you. Absolutely I wash my hands of you both!—Do you mean to say you are she?"

Adelaide nodded. "Have you tried spelling it backwards?"

"N-e-d-l-a, A-l-d-e-n. But why—but what—but ——"

She came further into the room. "I meant to have told you when it was accepted, Uncle Joe. But then—if it had taken any other prize—any other, except just second to Molly! Always second to Molly! I—but I won't take first because she gives it to me! I won't!"

With clenched hands and flashing eyes, she turned back toward the door.

Aunt Jane put her hand on her arm and stopped her. "My dear, you are a very fine person."

Mr. Oliphant was still sputtering. "Fine person! Fine person! Is that an explanation? But it doesn't admit of explanation!"

"It doesn't require explanation, I should say." Aunt Jane held Adelaide by the hand so she could not escape. "Of course, I have lived a very quiet and secluded life. And that fact has enabled me to keep fresh and unchanged the standards and ideals which we were all taught before the war. More so, perhaps, than those have who have lived where success is the only standard and ideal. At least I am still

able to understand the motives which prompted Adelaide to withdraw her picture."

"You don't understand!" exclaimed Adelaide. "You don't understand at all! You don't know. Let me go, Miss Alloway."

"My dear child. One knows a great deal at my age. Isn't it to be aunt?" She drew her face down and kissed her, patting her hair gently, and Adelaide, her defenses suddenly giving way, put her head down and sobbed.

Mr. Oliphant watched her uneasily, rubbing the tips of his fingers together, and twisting his mustache.

"Well, I don't understand! I confess I do not understand! Here I labor over these two girls, give them my strength, my talent, the best that is in me, and this is the way they reward me. This is ——"

"Oh!" Molly, who had been standing like a statue staring at the empty fireplace, turned as though she were waking from a dream. "Mr. Stuart said to me 'a teacher's pupils are his masterpieces. You owe it to Mr. Oliphant to show that picture.' Oh, what shall I do, Aunt Jane!"

"Did he say that? Keep still, all of you. I wish to think." Aunt Jane stood her stick up in front of her, clasped her hands over the handle and rested her chin on them. "This," she said, "is what comes of a lady stepping out of her proper sphere. If you had followed my advice and stayed at home where you belonged, you would not have found yourself in such a dilemma now. However, you did not choose to take my advice. This Mr.—Stuart, was it?—said you

owed it to your teacher to show the picture. Undoubtedly he is right. But how can you pay your debt when the picture is not yours? I confess myself at a loss how to advise you."

"The picture not Molly's! What do you mean, Jane?" demanded Mr. Oliphant.

"What I mean is very obvious, Joe. The picture belongs more to Adelaide, whose portrait it is, than it does to Molly, who merely painted it. And Adelaide says it is not to be shown."

Mr. Oliphant turned on Adelaide fiercely. "You say that! You dare ——"

"Oh, Uncle Joe, I took it back! I begged her to show it. Listen, Molly. If you show your picture I will show mine. Otherwise not."

"I don't care whether you do or not," said Molly, who was not, after all, completely temper proof.

"You don't care. Well I do! You owe it to me, Molly, do you understand? I demand that you exhibit that picture." Mr. Oliphant seemed in danger of bursting with the force of his emotions.

"Things have come to a pretty pass," said Aunt Jane, "when a lady is forced to accept a favor from anyone. But I think, Molly, you will have to lower your pride, and thank Adelaide for allowing you to show her picture."

"I ——" began Molly, and "I ——" began Adelaide, but Mr. Oliphant interrupted them both. "That's enough. I won't hear any more from either of you. I am going straight over to Four Oaks to send a telegram to Smith-Jones." He turned toward

the door and found himself facing Mr. Alloway. He glared at him defiantly. "How about that unbecoming mantle of fame?" he demanded. "Are you reconciled to her wearing it, or are you going to interfere again? If so I ——"

Mr. Alloway interrupted him. "I have always trusted my sister's judgment in such matters, implicitly, Joe."

"Having none of your own," remarked Mr. Oliphant. "Come, Adelaide. I want you to drive over with me and tell me how you came to paint 'Sarah.'"

CHAPTER XLII

SHE IS WONDERFUL, YOUR AUNT JANE!

MOLLY felt a little dazed by it all, as she had that day of the cheering. She still stood staring into the cold fireplace and hardly heard the others going out. She did not see Aunt Jane signal Jane out of the room. Nor did she know that everyone had gone but Allen till he spoke to her, and, looking up, she found herself alone with him.

"I'm glad you are going to show your picture, Miss Molly."

"Thanks."

Why should it make her feel embarrassed to know he was not engaged? If he wasn't, he hadn't been, and there was no change at all. But there was a change. There was a change in his manner, in the way he looked at her, in the tone of his voice.

"I shall be a very proud man, the day I make such a masterpiece as that in my line, a great bridge or a dam, or something."

"A thing like that makes a picture seem very useless, doesn't it?" Molly had a strange feeling of being under the edge of an avalanche, that she must not speak either loud or long for fear of precipitating it. She hardly moved her lips.

"No, it doesn't! Will you go for a walk with me, Miss Molly?"

"Surely."

She led the way across the field to the path along which she and Adelaide had walked two days before. She spoke her warning mechanically. "Be careful to keep in the centre. The ground is soft on the sides."

"I'll take care."

After that they walked in silence. But as they followed the narrow dykes between the reaching branches of the trees and the swinging tendrils of the vines more thoughts passed between them than many words could have carried.

They came out at last on the bank of the river and Molly stopped to let Allen come abreast of her. Both of them knew then what was coming, but still they hesitated.

A couple of miles away Pimlico stood on the shore, strong and stately looking in the distance, dominating the landscape.

"What's that?" asked Allen.

"One of the old plantation houses. Pimlico, where the Leas used to live."

"Who lives there now?"

"No one. It's in ruins. Burned in the war."

"Were there many like that?"

"Yes. All up and down the rivers."

"Alloway is the only one that's inhabited now, isn't it?"

"It's the only one that's habitable."

"It really is terrible. We don't half realize it in the North."

"It's hard on the older people, like Grandfather and Aunt Jane, who grew up with it all as it was."

"She is very wonderful, your Aunt Jane. I have never seen anyone like her."

Slowly they were coming round to deeper things.

"Yes, she is wonderful."

"She—she——" Allen took the plunge. "She told me yesterday that you said I was engaged."

Molly pulled a blade of grass and twisted it between her fingers. "She—she told me this morning that you were not engaged."

"No. I am not. Did she tell you nothing else?"

"No."

He looked away down the river. Then he turned and looked at Molly, a long dreaming look. "Molly Alloway, Molly Alloway, how I love you!" he murmured. He said it low, more to himself than to her. But Molly heard the words and the color swept to her cheeks. She threw away her blade of grass and pulled another, her eyes on the ground.

They were sitting on the river bank, down by the brown water.

"Then I shall tell you, Molly."

He drew nearer to her, not quite touching her, but leaning close, his eyes on her face as though he would drag her eyes up from the ground to meet them. And as he talked, little by little they rose, till they met his at last with a shock that sent a quiver through her.

Allen came to the end of his story, and paused. And

then he spoke again, very low, half in a whisper.
"Oh, Molly, I love you."

And Molly spoke, stretching out her hand. "And,
Allen, I love you."

THE END

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